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Since religious identity is known to influence one’s self-concept, moral judgments, and worldview (Allport, 1950; Johnson & Grim, 2013; Tragakis & Smith, 2010; Ysseldyk, Matheson, & Anisman, 2010), it is imperative for counselor educators to understand how counselors-in-training are integrating their religious identity with their professional identity, especially as legal cases such as *Ward v. Wilbanks* (2009) and *Keeton v. Anderson-Wiley* (2010), and the ethical conflicts they present, challenge the field of counselor education. A religious identity that may face particular challenges in the counselor education environment is Evangelical Protestants, as their faith practice tends to emphasize Biblical literalism, missionary efforts, and socio-political stances that can conflict with the values presented in the American Counseling Association’s (ACA) Code of Ethics (ACA, 2014; Balmer, 2006; National Association of Evangelicals [NAE], n.d.; NAE, 2018a). If a counselor-in-training is struggling to rectify their evangelical identity with the Code of Ethics, it is likely that the student is experiencing cognitive dissonance and identity incongruence, which can cause negative effects in the student’s mental health (Burke & Stets, 2009; Festinger, 1957). Social Identity Theory can be helpful in understanding the processes of social identities and how humans tend to navigate conflicts in verifying their social identities (Burke & Stets, 2009).

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of evangelical-identifying counselors in their counselor education, in order to better inform counselor educators on the challenges of integrating potentially conflicting identities of faith and

profession. Four participants who self-identified white evangelical women shared their lived experiences during their counselor education program via semi-structured interviews. The research team summarized common themes and experiences using the methodology of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The fourteen common themes that arose across the interviews were sorted into three phases: Pre-Program (*Influential communities, Core beliefs, Identity standard, Decision to become a counselor, and Program selection*), During Program (*Challenging program content, Perceived program rejection of the white evangelical identity, Role of faculty, Identity distress, Coping with identity distress, Ripple effects into faith community,* and *Experiences of congruence between counselor and white evangelical identities),* and Post-Program (*Effects on personal faith* and *Effects on career*). After developing these themes through the IPA process, Social Identity Theory (Burke & Stets, 2005) was used as a model to examine the phenomenon in an effort to build a conceptual understanding of white evangelical identity distress and integration before, during, and after counselor education programs.

Keywords: white evangelical, identity, counselor education

A STRUGGLE FOR "GRACE AND TRUTH": A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION OF COUNSELOR EDUCATION'S EFFECTS ON WHITE EVANGELICAL IDENTITY

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Americans tend to be religious, and mental health counselors in the United States are no exception. According to the Pew Research Center ([PRC], 2014), roughly 76.5% of American adults identify as religious, with 70.6% identifying with the Christian tradition, which PRC defined as Evangelical Protestant (25.4%), Mainline Protestant (14.7%), Historically Black Protestant (6.5%), Catholic (20.8%), Mormon (1.6%), Orthodox Christian (0.5%), Jehovah's Witness (0.8%), and other Christian denominations (0.4%). Notably, the most prominent tradition Americans tend to identify with is Evangelical Protestant, with its geographic center in the southeastern United States (U.S.) (PRC, 2014). Although literature on the religious and spiritual identities of counselors is sparse, researchers in the counseling field have confirmed similar rates of religiosity and spirituality in counselors (Balkin, Schlosser, & Levitt, 2009; Giordano, Prosket, & Lankford, 2014; Kelly, 1994; Morrison & Borgen, 2010; Prest, Russel, & D'Souza, 1999; Sheridan, Bullis, Adcock, Berlin, & Miller, 2014). In their studies of counselors' religious identities, Balkin et al. (2009) found that 72% of their sample of counseling professionals identified as Christian; in Giordano et al. (2014), 56.1% their sample of counseling graduate students identified as Christian; 65% of Kelly's (1994) sample of American Counseling Association members identified as Christian; and 63.2%

of Prest et al.'s (1999) marriage and family therapy students identified as Christian. Though none of these studies examined the particular denominational affiliation of their sample, it would follow that since counselors tend to follow the national average of identifying as Christian, a portion similar to the national average would identify as Evangelical Protestant. Despite a clear trend that counselors in the U.S., like their fellow Americans, tend to identify as Christian, there is very little information on how their religious identity influences their professional identity.

Religion and religious identity can have a powerful impact on the actions, values, and worldview of the individual. Religion is a system of beliefs and practices that possess tradition, codes of behavior, rituals, and devotion to a way of life and/or deity, and religious identity that is endorsed by a community of like-minded people (Albanese, 1992; Richards & Bergin, 2005; Worthington & Sandage, 2016). Religious identity, then, is a specific social identity formation that recognizes one's membership in a specific religion as well as the importance of this membership to one's self-concept (Ysseldyk, Matheson, & Anisman, 2010). Religious identity can shape one's societal attitudes, moral judgments, and worldview, as well as one's interactions with others (Allport, 1950; Johnson & Grim, 2013; Tragakis & Smith, 2010). This is particularly relevant for counselors as their clinical work can be influenced by their religious identity.

This idea can be seen in two recent studies examining the role of Christian religious identity and competent multicultural counseling practice. For example, Bidell (2014) found that "significantly lower levels of LGB-affirmative counselor competence were related to more religiously conservative counselors" (p. 175). Similarly, Balkin,

Schlosser, and Levitt (2009) reported that counselor trainees with more rigid spiritual beliefs may face significant challenges in their multicultural development, as it may inhibit openness to other perspectives. In their study, Balkin and colleagues (2009) found that counselors who ascribed to Christian beliefs tended to score higher on scales measuring homophobia and sexism, indicating biases, which are areas that may be influenced by Christian beliefs about sexuality and gender. Biases, of course, are not limited to religious beliefs in general, or Christian beliefs in particular. Due to the social nature of identities, every identity can host implicit and explicit biases (Holroyd & Sweetman, 2016). Since counselors work with a wide variety of clients with varying identities that could differ from their own (Arrendondo & Arciniega, 2011), the counseling field recognizes the need for counselors-in-training to recognize their own identities and biases (American Counseling Association, 2014). There are two key ways by which the profession protects clients from imposition of clinician values: the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP)'s required social cultural diversity core content (CACREP, 2001; 2016) and the American Counseling Association (ACA) Code of Ethics (ACA, 2014).

CACREP's social cultural diversity requirement and the ACA's Code of Ethics are methods by which the profession endeavors to protect the welfare of clients and demand ethical practice from clinicians. CACREP (2016) requires accredited institutions to provide content in their curricula in which students are not only taught the nuances of different identities, theories, and models of multicultural counseling (CACREP Standard II.F.2.b), and the multicultural counseling competencies (CACREP Standard II.F.2.c);

they are also asked to examine the effects of power and privilege in society and within counseling dyads (CACREP Standard II.F.2.e), and their own identities, biases, and prejudices that could impact their work with clients (CACREP Standard II.F.2.d). For many programs, this requirement is met through a specific course in which multicultural counseling and issues related to social identities are the foci. Notably, CACREP (2016) requires the core content to help students identify "the impact of spiritual beliefs on clients' and counselors' worldviews" (CACREP, 2016, p. 11), indicating a recognition of the impact a counselor's values and beliefs could have on a client. Although not all counseling programs are CACREP-accredited, this requirement is one way in which leaders in the counseling profession strive to protect client welfare.

For accredited and non-accredited programs alike, the ACA's Code of Ethics (2014) provides another avenue towards protecting clients from imposition of counselor values. The goal of the ACA's Code of Ethics is three-fold: to promote the development of professional counselors, advance the counseling profession, and use the profession and practice of counseling to promote respect for human dignity and diversity (ACA, 2014). Section A.4 directly addresses clinician values, stating that counselors are to be "aware of – and avoid imposing – their own values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors" (ACA, 2014, p. 5). This section does not provide detail of what avoiding imposition of values looks like, but instead states that clinicians need to respect the diversity of clients and pay attention to interactions in which the client's goals are incongruent with the counselor's values (ACA, 2014). Both CACREP and the ACA clearly draw on the ethical principles of autonomy, nonmaleficence, and beneficence in these requirements; these principles

guide the counselor towards ensuring that clients are provided with the right to control the direction of their life, as well as mandate counselors to avoid actions that cause harm while working for the good of the individual (Kitchener, 1984).

Though the counseling profession clearly values client welfare, the field seems to be struggling to understand how to respect counselors' religious identities and beliefs while ensuring ethical practice. Two legal cases have garnered public attention on the topic of religious counselors and potential challenges in avoiding the imposition of values on their clients; notably, counselors in training in both cases identified as conservative Protestant Christians (Francis & Dugger, 2014). One such case was *Keeton v. Anderson-Wiley* (2010). Jennifer Keeton, a student in the Counselor Education Program at Augusta State University (ASU) in Georgia, was seeking her Master of Education in school counseling (Hall, 2010). Through classroom discussion, assignments, and interactions with fellow students and faculty, Keeton shared her religious beliefs concerning the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) populations: she "condemned same-sex relationships based upon the Bible's teachings; affirmed binary male-female gender, with one or the other being fixed in each person at their creation," and believed that an LGBTQ identity was a "lifestyle," not a "state of being" (Hall, 2010, para. 4). For Keeton, the Bible's teachings of sexuality would determine how she would interact with clients who identified as LGBTQ; she stated that while working with LGBTQ-identifying clients, she would express that their identity was immoral and encourage them to change their behavior and identity (Hall, 2010). ASU's counseling faculty believed this to be unethical and required Keeton to complete a remediation plan in which she would

increase her exposure to LGBTQ populations and issues, read articles on best practices in working with LGBTQ clients, attend trainings, and familiarize herself with the Association for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues in Counseling's (ALGBTIC) counseling competencies, among other activities. Depending on Keeton's completion of and learning through the remediation plan, the faculty would decide if she would be allowed to complete the program (Hall, 2010). Keeton refused to participate in the remediation plan and sued ASU, citing that her First Amendment right to free speech had been violated. Ultimately, the Court ruled in favor of ASU and Keeton was dismissed from her program (Giordano, Bevly, Tucker, & Prosek, 2018).

Ward v. Wilbanks (2009) involved similar issues. Julea Ward, during her counseling graduate program, was dismissed from Eastern Michigan State University (EMU) for refusing to work with a gay client (American Civil Liberties Union [ACLU], 2011). Ward sued the school, claiming that she had the right to deny counseling services and blanketly refer any client who wished to discuss same-sex or unmarried sexual relationships (ACLU, 2011). Originally, the court upheld EMU's decision to dismiss Ward, but the U.S. Court of Appeals determined that Ward's actions did not violate the then-current ACA Code of Ethics (Giordano et al., 2018). In 2014, the ACA released an updated ethical code to more clearly address the unethical nature of values imposition and prohibit values-based referrals (Giordano et al., 2018). Shortly after the release of this new code, Tennessee Senate Bill 1556/House Bill 1840 (2016) was passed to provide legal exemptions for service providers (e.g., counselors) who deny services on the basis of religious beliefs or deeply held convictions (Giordano et al., 2018). To demonstrate

opposition to this law, the ACA moved their annual conference from Nashville, Tennessee, to San Francisco, California in 2017 (Giordano et al, 2018).

The history of counseling and its approach to spirituality is complicated. In its most forgiving review, counselor education has been observed to address counselor values and beliefs by training counselors to keep their values and beliefs systems private (Pargament, 2007); in its harshest, the counseling profession has been seen as antagonistic towards religion and spirituality at times (Powers, 2005). A reason for this complicated history between these two giants – psychology and religion – is a genuine concern for protecting clients and preventing harm. The intent here is honorable and incredibly important: the ACA, CACREP, and counselor educators want to prevent counselors from imposing their beliefs on clients and protect clients from psychological harm.

However, this top-down approach is insufficient on its own. Counselors-in-training must also engage with their religious identity in a thoughtful and intentional manner, engaging in private and public discourse around how their religious identity is affected by their counselor identity, so that they can fully embody the ethical codes of the counselor profession. Religious identity, and the worldview it creates, is an intensely personal process that is attained through family, culture, and/or revelatory experiences that can shape one's orientation to the world, including political beliefs, moral attitudes, friendships, decision making processes, work life, familial relationships, and one's standard of success; it also affects one's coping through tragedy and transition (Haidt, 2012; Johnson & Grim, 2013; PRC, 2016; Pargament, 2007). If counselors-in-training are

struggling to rectify their religious beliefs with the Code of Ethics or other material inherent in a counselor education program, such as Ward and Keeton, it is likely the students are experiencing a deluge of conflicting messages and beliefs concerning their self-concept, sense of worth, and purpose. As counselor identity and religious identity merge, cognitive dissonance and identity incongruence can cause ripple effects in students' personal life and classroom environment (Burke & Stets, 2009; Giordano et al., 2018).Thus, counselor educators need to help counselors-in-training process how they are reconciling their religious beliefs and identity with their professional obligations and identity. As such, counselor educators have a unique opportunity to both challenge and support students as identity dissonance and conflict is occurring.

Judging by recent publications in leading journals and presentations topics at significant conferences in the field, the counselor education field seems to be recognizing the potential significant implications of conservative Christian counselors and the values conflicts they might face in their programs. This topic has become a subject of interest and debate in the counseling field. One of the first noteworthy pieces of literature on this topic included a series of articles published in 2016 in the *Journal of Counseling and Development*. In the first article, Smith and Okech (2016) posed important ethical and philosophical questions for the profession: should religious institutions who disaffirm or disallow diverse sexual orientations be permitted to gain CACREP-accreditation? Although on the surface the authors asked a systemic question, the implication was clear: Smith and Okech (2016) were asking the profession to consider whether individuals who hold conservative Christian values can maintain non-discriminatory, ethical practice for

clients of all backgrounds. Can clinicians who have gained their education at institutions that require them to sign codes on conduct that espouse beliefs that disaffirm or disavow LGB sexual expression provide services to individuals with LGB identities without bringing these values into their work? Smith and Okech (2016) held that institutions that require these policies or codes of conduct are discriminatory, and thus the profession should seriously consider if these schools can provide a CACREP-worthy education.

The second article in this series provided a response to these questions. Sells and Hagedorn (2016) offered important counterpoints from the side of conservative Christian institutions, counselor educators, and counselors. Although Sells and Hagedorn (2016) agreed with the premise that "all counselors, regardless of their scope of practice, must be prepared by the CACREP-accredited programs to deliver competent counseling services to all clients" (p. 266), they differed in their assessment of religious institutions' perceived discrimination against LGB individuals. Asserting that faith-based programs serve a particular social subculture, Sells and Hagedorn (2016) noted that counselor educators and counselors-in-training who choose to work for or attend these programs are drawn to these programs for the philosophy or training modality that they are offering; that is, these students and faculty members know what they are endorsing and have chosen these programs for that particular ideology. Similar to students and faculty who choose to work or attend Gallaudet University (for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing) or Adler University (for individuals seeking to learn the Adlerian modality), these individuals are looking for a specific training regimen that will meet their personal philosophies and needs. Sells and Hagedorn (2016) offered many conceptual and

practical models of helping conservative Christian counselors-in-training become ethical practitioners including the importance of bracketing, mentorship from like-minded counselor educators, and utilizing the Ethical Acculturation Model (Handelsman, Gottlieb, & Knapp, 2005), to help students understand value conflicts that result from bicultural identity formation.

These articles by Smith and Okech (2016) and Sells and Hagedorn (2016) were historic in their relevance to the meaning-making that the counseling profession is currently being forced to consider in regards to conservative Christian identities within the counseling field. Each gave side to the predominant arguments vying for implementation. However, their writings were not the profession's only attempt at making sense of this topic of debate. At the Association of Counselor Education and Supervision's 2019 conference in Seattle, Washington, several presentations hinted at the continued need for debate and enactment. In the following presentation titles, each presenter highlighted the importance of helping students navigate values conflicts – as well as the difficulty this process presents for counselor educators:

- "Promoting supervisees' cognitive complexity, cognitive empathy, and cultural competence: Addressing spirituality in supervision" (Glosoff & Land-Shubbers, 2019).
- "A culturally sensitive guide for assisting students with value conflicts" (Parsons, Smith, Elkins, & Tift, 2019).
- "Addressing conscience clause legislation in counselor education and supervision" (Rose, 2019).

- "Ethical and effective remediation practices with students struggling to counsel members of the LBGTQ+ community due to a faith-based values conflict: A delphi study" (Taylor & Horn, 2019).
- "Ethical dilemmas deriving from a law protecting 'sincerely held principles'" (Terneus & Smith, 2019).

Clearly, there is a continuing need in the counseling profession to better understand the experiences of conservative Christian counselors-in-training. Accordingly, in this study the author examined the experiences of white evangelical counseling students – a social identity explored in more depth throughout this chapter and the next. White evangelical counselors-in-training have not yet received much attention in the counseling literature; in fact, the authors of relevant literature thus far seems to be utilizing broad language to describe those who might be facing values conflicts between their faith and counselor training program – preferring to label them as "religious counselors" or "conservative Protestant counselors." The author found this to be incredibly fascinating: despite the Ward v Wilbanks and Keeton v Anderson-Wiley course cases; the, albeit limited, findings regarding the links between conservative Christian trends and client care (e.g., Balkin et al., 2009; Bidell, 2014); and the public conversation the counseling education field is having regarding the gatekeeping practices of conservative Christians (e.g., Smith & Okech, 2016; Sells & Hagedorn, 2016), researchers have yet to name white evangelicals as a population of interest, though the beliefs they describe and label as "conservative Protestant" or "religious" tend to fit the definition of "white evangelical," which is explored in more detail below.

Burke and Stets's Identity Model

To best understand the challenges that counselors with religious identities face in their educational environment and profession, one must first understand the process of how social identities are evaluated by the individual. According to Burke and Stets (2009), an identity is composed of four basic components: an input, an identity standard, a comparator, and an output. These components form a cycle that operates continuously once an identity is activated.

The system begins when an input, or a perception garnered from the environment, activates an identity. An example of an input for a Christian counselor-in-training might be hearing a fellow student say in their social and cultural diversity class, "Christians are judgmental." This input is then compared to the identity standard, which is a set of meanings that an individual uses to define an identity. In the above case, the Christian student compares the input (i.e., Christians are judgmental) to their internal identity standard of "Christian." For the student, this could be something like, "Christians are kind, loving, and accepting of everyone." The identity and the input are then compared to determine how "correct" the input is to the individual's understanding of the identity; in the above case, the input and the identity standard are not compatible with one another as one cannot be accepting and judgmental at the same time.

From here, an error message is sent by the comparator, which functions to compare identity standards and inputs (Burke & Stets, 2009). In this stage, an identity is either verified by the environment (the identity standard matches the input) or unverified (the identity standard and input do not match). Once the comparator has evaluated the

input and identity standard, it produces an output, defined as an emotion followed by a social behavior. If an identity is unverified, the person will produce an output that should "correct" the incompatibility of the input and standard; that is, the individual will compensate in some way to maintain congruence between the identity standard and input. In this example, the student might feel anger at being misrepresented and offer a sarcastic comment in class to defend their hurt and/or embellish the ridiculousness of the classmate's thought. If the self is repeatedly unverified, cognitive dissonance occurs and individuals become distressed at the incongruence of their environment and their identity standard; physical health, emotional stability, self-esteem, and social behavior are all affected (Burke & Stets, 2009). To complicate matters further, every individual holds multiple identities and sometimes the identity standards for different identities can be in conflict with one another or create a unique definition of that particular intersecting identity. For example, for individuals who identify as "white" (a racial identity) and "evangelical" (a religious identity), these two identities intersect to create a unique identity: white evangelical. How this intersecting identity is different than the two distinct identities will explored in the next section and in greater detail in Chapter II. For now, it is important to note that, when an individual holds two identities with differing identity standards, the system is put into an impossible situation: one identity must invariably be unverified. Thus, the identity standards must shift to accommodate change so that the conflict is removed (Burke & Stets, 2009). The Burke and Stets (2009) model could be helpful in explaining how evangelical Christian identity and counselor identity could be in conflict within counselors and explain the social behaviors that could result.

White Evangelical Identity

A religious identity that may face particular challenges in the counselor education environment is that of the white protestant evangelical. The term "evangelical" is not limited to one denomination or spiritual practice, but instead encompasses many denominations including, but not limited to, Southern Baptists, Pentecostals, charismatics, independent Bible churches, and Fundamentalists (Bean, 2014). The PRC stated that roughly 25% of religious Americans identify as evangelical (PRC, 2014). Evangelicalism is not solely a "white" phenomenon; indeed, the PRC stated that evangelicalism is a growing identity among African Americans and Hispanic populations (PRC, 2014). For several reasons, however, this study, though, is limited to the experiences of white evangelical students in counselor education programs, with the most prominent one being that white evangelicalism, due to the host of privileges that come from the intersecting white and Christian identities, is enacted and regarded differently than African American or Hispanic evangelicalism (Bracey & Moore, 2017). Another way of describing this phenomenon, which will be explored in greater depth in Chapter II, is that the intersection of "white evangelical" leads to a unique enactment of both "whiteness" and "evangelicalism."

The National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), founded in 1942, describe themselves as a group that "seeks to honor God by connecting and representing evangelical Christians in the United States" (NAE, 2018a). Representing more than 45,000 churches in over 40 denominations, the NAE serves as a lobbyist organization that represents "evangelical concerns to the [U.S.] government" and mobilizes

evangelicals to engage in the public and civic spheres (NAE, 2018a). Their goal is to provide a forum in which evangelicals work together to "preserve religious liberty, protect the sanctity of human life, seek justice for the poor, work for peace, and care for God's creation" (NAE, 2018b). The NAE defines evangelicalism through four characteristics:

1. Conversionism: the belief that lives need to be transformed through a "born-again" experience and a life-long commitment to following Jesus;
2. Activism: the expression and demonstration of the Gospel in missionary efforts, which include social reform;
3. Biblicism: a high regard for and obedience to the Bible as the ultimate authority;
4. Cruicentrism: an emphasis on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as making possible the redemption of humanity.

These beliefs could be in conflict with counselor ethics, and thus evangelical-identifying counselors-in-training might experience more difficulty in reconciling their religious identity with their counselor identity as explained earlier in this chapter. This will be explored in more depth in Chapter II.

Statement of the Problem

Due to evangelicals' emphasis on biblical scripture as the "ultimate authority" on moral living and missionary efforts that endeavor to have larger society conform to biblical values, the identity standards of counselor and evangelical may be contradictory in some regards. The two identity standards may conflict around issues concerning same

sex relationships, sexuality, gender roles, and gender identities in particular. For example, the counselor identity emphasizes non-judgment and affirmation of all people (ACA, 2014; AGLBTIC Taskforce, 2013), while the evangelical Christian identity standard tends to regard same sex relationships and non-binary gender identities as unacceptable (Miller, 2015; NAE, 2012).

Differing identity standards cannot exist peacefully within an individual; the identities must be reconciled so that cognitive dissonance is eliminated and the individual can validate their identity (Burke & Stets, 2009). As such, evangelical-identifying counselors are likely at a higher risk for emotional dysregulation, increased stress levels, compromised physical health, and increased likelihood of adverse social behavior in their educational environment (Burke & Stets, 2009). Counselor educators need more information on how to effectively support and challenge their students who might be experiencing identity invalidation, distress, and cognitive dissonance surrounding religious and professional identities. Without this information, the counseling field could be graduating counselors who are experiencing deep distress, putting these counselors at risk for mental illness and their future clients at risk for incompetent clinical care. To provide the counseling field with more information on the needs and challenges that evangelical counseling students face, the researcher will explore the experiences of evangelical counselors in their training programs and work as counselors.

Purpose of the Study

Accordingly, the purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of evangelical-identifying counselors in their counselor education programs in order to

better inform counselor educators on how to help these students navigate the challenges of integrating potentially conflicting identity standards. Participants who self-identified as holding evangelical beliefs during their counselor education program were invited to share their experience of counselor education, challenges they faced, and the effect their program had on their religious beliefs. The researcher then identified and summarized common themes and experiences via Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, 2004) methodology. The goal of the study was to provide counselor educators with information on how to best challenge and support counselors-in-training while the students begin to integrate religious and counselor identities.

Research Question

In order to address the gap in existing literature and to provide counselor educators with information on how to challenge and support their evangelical-identifying students, this study addressed the following research question:

In what ways do counselor training programs affect white evangelical counselor's social identity as white evangelicals?

Need for the Study

The consequences of cognitive dissonance are well known: physical health, mood disorders like anxiety and depression, and increased emotional reactivity (Elliot, 1994; Harmon-Jones & Harmon-Jones, 2008). Counselors who identify as evangelical may find cognitive dissonance inescapable as they reconcile their evangelical identity with their counselor identity. Since counselors have an ethical mandate not only to avoid imposing their values on the client, but also to monitor themselves for "physical, mental, or

emotional problems" and refrain from providing counseling services when "showing signs of impairment" (ACA, 2014, p. 9), it of utmost importance that graduate training programs provide inclusive, safe environments in which their students can explore their beliefs and reconcile their religious and professional identities. To do this, counselor educators need information not currently provided in counseling literature: what are the concerns and experiences that evangelical students are facing in counselor education programs and how can educators adequately support and challenge them to become competent, healthy practitioners? This study endeavored to these questions.

Definition of Terms

Religion: a system of beliefs and practices, possessing tradition, codes of behavior, rituals, and devotion to a way of life and/or deity, endorsed by a community of like-minded people (Albanese, 1992; Richards & Bergin, 2005; Worthington & Sandage, 2016)

Spirituality: a set of patterns in how people relate with the sacred and/or the human spirit or soul (Worthington & Sandage, 2016)

Religious Identity: a specific type of identity formation that recognizes one's membership in a specific religion and the importance of this membership as it pertains to one's self-concept [The researcher created this definition based on social identity theory research; see Ysseldyk, Matheson, & Anisman (2010) for a succinct overview of this theory.]

Evangelical Christian: individuals with deeply held convictions that Jesus is the only way to salvation, the Bible is the ultimate authority on right living, a personal

commitment to Christ is necessary to living faithfully, and social reform is a necessary mechanism of sharing and living the Gospel (NAE, n.d.)

Evangelical-Identifying: an individual who ascribes to the beliefs as stated under "Evangelical Christian"; for the purposes of this study, the individual would not necessarily have to ascribe to the label of "Evangelical" to be evangelical-identifying

Identity Standard: a component of the identity model that contains a set of meanings that define a particular identity (Burke & Stets, 2009)

Identity Comparator: a component of the identity model that compares perceptions from the environment to the identity standard; it contains the ability to judge if the perception in the environment matches the identity standard (Burke & Stets, 2009)

Identity Verification: a process that occurs when the identity standard matches the perception in the environment; the individual is receiving feedback they are the person who their standard indicates (Burke & Stets, 2009)

Identity Invalidation: a process that occurs when the identity standard does not match the perception in the environment; the individual receives feedback that they are not the person who their standard indicates [Burke and Stets (2009) used the terms "failure of identity verification" and "failure of identity validation" interchangeably to describe this experience; to simplify this phrase, the researcher will use "identity invalidation" instead.]

Cognitive Dissonance: the state of having inconsistent thoughts, beliefs, or attitudes, especially as relating to behavioral decisions, attitude change, and strongly held identities (Cooper, 2007; Festinger, 1957; 1962)

Identity Distress: distress caused by cognitive dissonance around one's identity (Burke & Stets, 2009)

Summary

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. The purpose of Chapter I was to introduce the topic and provide the purpose of the study, including a statement of the problem that included the gap in literature, rationale, need for the study, research question, and operational definitions of key terms used in this study. In Chapter II, the researcher synthesizes and critiques the existing literature to provide a relevant background on evangelical identity and how it might conflict with the counselor identity, as well as review the conceptual framework for the study. Chapter III provides an explanation and overview of the qualitative methodology chosen for this study. Chapter IV contains the results of the study, while Chapter V provides a discussion of the findings as well as its limitations, implications for counselor educators, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In Chapter I, a summary of counselor education's potential impact on white evangelical students was provided and a study was introduced to explore this phenomenon more fully. In this chapter, relevant literature will be summarized and synthesized to describe the history of evangelicalism and its construct as a social identity, the relevance of evangelicalism to the counseling field, how evangelicalism relates to the framework of Social Identity Theory, and the harm that could occur towards evangelical-identifying students in counselor education programs.

Religion and Spirituality

Religion and spirituality can have a powerful impact on the actions and perceptions of the individual. In his landmark work, Allport (1950) illustrated that religious and spiritual beliefs can profoundly impact an individual's personality development, sense of identity, and interactions. Religion in particular, often established early in life and reinforced throughout childhood, can shape one's self-concept, societal attitudes, moral judgements, and worldview (Allport, 1950; Johnson & Grim, 2013; Tragakis & Smith, 2010). Definitions of religion and spirituality differ widely throughout the literature, but are regarded as two separate entities, though they can merge or be interwoven within an individual's religious or spiritual identity and practice (Morrison &

Borgen, 2010). Religion is typically regarded as a system of beliefs and practices that possesses tradition, codes of behavior, rituals, and devotion to a way of life and/or deity (Albanese, 1992; Richards & Bergin, 2005; Worthington & Sandage, 2016). Additionally, a religion must be endorsed by a community of like-minded people (Albanese, 1992; Richards & Bergin, 2005; Worthington & Sandage, 2016). Spirituality is more difficult to define, but is generally regarded as "the capacity and tendency present in human beings to find and construct meaning about life and existence" (Myers & Williard, 2003, p. 149). Although both religion and spirituality can impact the individual, this study will examine how one particular religious identity is affected by counselor education.

Existing literature focused on counselors' religious identities and spirituality is limited in scope. Although there is a large body of counseling literature that addresses spirituality and religion, authors tend to focus their work, both conceptual and empirical in nature, on the integration of spirituality into clinical work and how to work with a client's spirituality or religious beliefs (Balkin, Schlosser, & Levitt, 2009; Cashwell & Young, 2001; Evans, 2003; Richards & Bergin, 2000; Walker, Gorsuch, & Tan, 2005; Watkins van Asselt & Baldo Senstock, 2009). There is an astonishing dearth of literature that explores counselors' religious identities and the effect on religion has on skill and professional identity development (Balkin, Schlosser, & Levitt, 2009; Morrison & Borgen, 2010). This is shocking as counselors tend to report spirituality and religion as a value in their lives (Balkin et al., 2009; Giordano et al., 2014; Kelly, 1994; Morrison &

Borgen, 2010; Prest, Russel, & D'Souza, 1999; Sheridan, Bullis, Adcock, Berlin & Miller, 2014).

In the few articles focused on understanding the impact of religious and spiritual identities on counselors' clinical work and professional development, these identities seem to have a wide array of effects. Spirituality, broadly defined, has been found to possess both hindering and helping qualities that affect the counselor's empathy for the client (Balkin et al., 2009; Bidell, 2014) and the clinician's approach to and awareness of a client's spiritual concerns (Watkins van Asselt & Baldo Senstock, 2009). A growing body of literature points to the need for counselor educators to explore how religion and spirituality are integrated into theory, practice, and client outcomes (Balkin et al., 2009; Cashwell, Young, Cashwell, & Belaire, 2001; Knox, Catlin, Casper, & Schlosser, 2005). However, researchers have not given attention to how counselor-in-training's religious identity could affect their experience as well as their personal and professional development within counselor training programs.

Evangelicalism

Evangelicalism, the particular religious identity examined in this study, derives its etymological roots from the Koine Greek word εὐαγγέλιον (transliterated as euangelion), meaning "of the good news" or "related to the gospel" (Olsen, 2004, p. 3). Evangelicalism is a specific religious tradition within the broader Protestant Christian tradition and while evangelicals come from many different racial and cultural backgrounds, nearly three-quarters of American evangelicals identify as white and nearly half reside in the southeastern United States (PRC, 2015). Evangelicalism has a varied

reputation and reception in America; for many, including some who identify as Protestant Christians, evangelicalism is associated with controversy, political conservatism, white nationalism, or specific social issues, such as abortion. For others, evangelicalism is simply a religious practice and/or a cultural group. This section will explore the nuanced history of evangelicalism, how the modern evangelical worldview arose in America, the differences between evangelicalism and fundamentalism, and conclude with a discussion of white evangelicalism as a social identity.

A Brief History of Evangelicalism

The earliest roots of Protestant evangelicalism are found in New Testament churches—communities that arose in the Middle East, Roman Empire, and Africa after the crucifixion of Christ as depicted in the book of Acts (c.70 to 90 A.D.) (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2014). These communities, made up of diverse religious and cultural backgrounds, emphasized repentance of sin and dedication of one's life to Jesus Christ's example. New Testament communities were under the leadership and direction of apostles like Saints Paul and Peter (Thurston, 2000). The term "evangelical" evolved in the sixteenth century as the Protestant Reformation began to change the religious landscape of Europe (Thurston, 2000). At this time, "evangelical" became interchangeable with "Protestant", as the works of Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, and John Calvin openly challenged the Roman Catholic Church's interpretation of scriptures (Olsen, 2004). The term "evangelical" evolved yet again in the eighteenth century in Great Britain and the American colonies as a revival of Christian faith known as the Great Awakening occurred, led by theologians John and Charles Wesley, George

Whitefield, and Jonathan Edwards (Olsen, 2004). These leaders, who called themselves "evangelicals" and "evangelists," encouraged participants to embrace a new form of Christianity that welcomed emotional expression and encouraged personal commitment to Jesus Christ and his teachings (Olsen, 2004). Thus, by the nineteenth century, evangelicalism became synonymous with Great Awakening-inspired revivalism, in which baptism, repentance, and transformation were heavily emphasized (Olsen, 2004).

By 1889, Evangelical Protestantism was the dominant religious ideology in America (Thurston, 2000). One must note that at this time there was not a distinction between Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism (Olsen, 2004; Thurston, 2000). The two groups were considered one and the same; both described a desire to "reaffirm what [conservative Protestants] considered the 'fundamentals of faith,'" such as "the transcendence of God, the reality of the Trinity, the deity of Jesus Christ, the virgin birth and bodily resurrection of Jesus, and the inspiration and authority of the Bible" (Olsen, 2004, p. 5). The fundamentalist-evangelicals[1] drew their rhetoric from arguments that were later published in the 1910s in series of pamphlets entitled *The Fundamentals.* These pamphlets were an argument against a shift towards theological liberalism in Protestant denominations. The authors of this text urged their readers to return to the "fundamentals" or basics of Christianity, warning of the threats that Darwinism and biblical literary criticism held to the Christian faith (Balmer, 2006). The two ideologies

[1] In most texts, historians either label the fundamentalist-evangelical movement prior to the 1930s as either "fundamentalist" or "evangelical." The author has chosen to hyphenate this term to help the reader clearly delineate when fundamentalists and evangelicals began to distinguish themselves from one another.

eventually distinguished themselves from each other, and the distinctions between the two are described later in this chapter.

Between the late-1800s and 1930s, fundamentalist-evangelicalism began to lose popularity under the influence of German higher criticism, scientific and technological advances, and the theory of evolution (Thurston, 2000). Perhaps the most well-known event that underscored the collapse of the influence of fundamentalist-evangelical worldview was the Scopes Monkey Trial in 1925. In this trial, the state of Tennessee sued John Thomas Scopes, a high school teacher and football coach, for teaching a chapter from the textbook *Civic Biology: Present in Problems* in a biology course which described the theory of evolution, race, and eugenics (Grebstein & Scopes, 1960). In truth, Scopes could not remember if he taught from the text; his motivation was to support the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) as they sought to challenge the newly minted Butler Act, which made it illegal to teach human evolution in the public school system (Grebstein & Scopes, 1960; Lienesch, 2007). Scopes agreed to be a test case.

The Butler Act had mixed support in Tennessee. It was named for State Representative John W. Butler who lobbied the state legislatures to pass an anti-evolution act that would prevent the teaching of Darwinism in public schools (Larson, 1997). Butler, who was also the head of an interdenominational, anti-evolution organization called the World Christian Fundamentals Association, believed public schools "served to promote citizenship based on biblical concepts of morality" (Larson, 1997, p 50), and thus saw evolution as a threat: he believed it would lead to the eradication of Christian

values in future generations and was a peril to the future of America. Austin Peay, the then-governor of Tennessee and a Progressive who supported an expansion of the public school system, signed the Act into law largely to gain support among rural legislators, believing that the law would not be enforced or interfere with Tennessee's public school education system (Larson, 1997). William Jennings Bryan, a three-time Democratic Presidential nominee, lawyer, and an influential fundamentalist-evangelical, publicly and enthusiastically thanked Peay for the Butler Act, stating, "The Christian parents of [Tennessee] owe you a debt of gratitude for saving their children from the poisonous influence of an unproven hypothesis" (Bryan, 1925, n.p.).

The Scopes Trial was, essentially, a public performance. Journalists swarmed Dayton, Tennessee, the site of the trial, as the ACLU, Scopes, and his infamous defense attorney Clarence Darrow publicly challenged William Jennings Bryan as he represented the prosecution and, metaphorically, the fundamentalist-evangelical worldview (Lienesch, 2007). Bryan and Darrow, two of the most celebrated and controversial figures of their time, confronted one another for two weeks in July 1925, "in a courtroom drama that would captivate millions across the country and around the world, (Lienesch, 2007, p. 139). The case, quickly dubbed the "Monkey Trial," pitted traditional values and religion against science and education with one of the most significant and far-reaching winnings at stake: the American public's opinion and support. Bryan and the evangelical-fundamentalist group he represented encouraged the sensationalism of the trial, seeing it as an opportunity to win back mainstream America to its perceived evangelical roots. The verdict validated the anti-evolution group: Scopes was convicted of violating the Butler

Act. However, the stakes were lost; the media ridiculed Bryan and his viewpoint, labeling fundamentalist-evangelicals as uneducated and backwards (Lienesch, 2007; Sutton, 2013). The fundamentalist-evangelical group was devastated. To make matters worse, Bryan died in his sleep days after the verdict was given, purportedly, a result of his passionate arguments made during the trial and the rejection of the fundamentalist-evangelical worldview by many Americans (Lienesch, 2007; Sutton, 2013). The fundamentalist-evangelicals began to gradually withdrawal from mainstream culture into its own subculture which, as the decades passed, grew to include Bible camps, colleges, seminaries, missionary societies, music industries, and publishing houses (Balmer, 2006; Olsen, 2004; Thurston, 2000).

The evangelical subculture remained largely invisible to the larger American society until the mid-1970s when it suddenly dominated the media (Balmer, 2006). From the Scopes Trial until the mid-1970s, evangelicals were present in American culture through the emergence of televangelism and leaders of the evangelical movement, such as Billy Graham, Jerry Falwell, Sr., Jim and Tammye Faye Bakker, and Pat Robertson, entered the modern vernacular. However, these leaders held limited degrees of influence within and upon the mainstream culture during this era (Balmer 2006; Thurston, 2000).

What changed, then? In the 1970s, a Southern Baptist Sunday School teacher from Atlanta, Georgia, ran for president. Jimmy Carter, the Democratic candidate, unashamedly proclaimed his identity as a “born again Christian,” and captivated evangelicals with his Southern gentleman ethos and traditional values. This motivated evangelicals to leave their apolitical torpor where they had resided since the Scopes Trial

(Balmer 2006; Thurston, 2000). With support of the evangelical subculture, particularly that of televangelists Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell Sr., Carter was elected in 1976 (Balmer, 2006). However, his presidency was largely disappointing to evangelicals in regards to furthering their platform and political interests. Around this time, the evangelical subculture had coalesced into a political movement known as the Religious Right, and had moved their support to Republican candidate Ronald Reagan (Balmer, 2006). The Religious Right was comprised of politically and religiously conservative organizations that lobbied for social and political change that was consistent with evangelical belief (Balmer, 2006). The Religious Right continues to be influential in today's culture, and has morphed over the years to include a specific set of political and social goals, including issues surrounding human sexuality, such as abortion and LGBTQ+ rights. How these particular political and social issues were identified as priorities to the Religious Right will be discussed at greater length later in this chapter. First, however, it is important to distinguish the differences between evangelicalism and fundamentalism.

Evangelicalism vs. Fundamentalism

As mentioned earlier, evangelicalism and fundamentalism were indistinguishable for many decades, and continue to be a source of confusion for many—how exactly is a fundamentalist different from an evangelical? Jerry Falwell, Sr., often joked that fundamentalists were "evangelicals who were mad about something" (Sutton, 2013, p. 5). Falwell's definition, tongue in cheek as it may be, serves to highlight the similarities between the groups more so than their distinctiveness, which is a common issue. Many

scholars believe that the Scopes Trial serves to delineate the beginning of the separation between fundamentalism and evangelicalism (Olsen, 2004). Less than 20 years after the trial, both groups consolidated their stances: the fundamentalists forming the American Council of Christian Churches (ACCC) in 1941, and the "new evangelicals," later shortening to just "evangelicals," forming the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) a year later. The NAE wished to distance themselves from the term "fundamentalist," which invoked memories of the Scopes Trial and images of "dogmatic, close-minded, reactionary religious fanatics" (Sutton, 2013, p. 7). While there is still no absolute line that divides the groups, and matters are complicated by fundamentalists' continued use of the term "evangelical" in their self-description, they are considered separate entities by both scholars and the groups themselves (Olsen, 2004; Thurston, 2000). Perhaps the clearest demarcation of the groups is their stance on integration into mainstream culture. Although both groups passionately agree on a pressing need to convert unbelievers to the Christian faith through sharing the Gospel, evangelicals tend to do this by remaining and evangelizing within the mainstream culture, while fundamentalists tend to see themselves as a "holy remnant" whose duty is to keep themselves separate from mainstream culture (Thurston, 2000).

To see examples of these distinctions, one only needs to look to each group's response to the social movements of the mid-twentieth century. Billy Graham, the face of evangelicalism for much of the 20th century, clearly demonstrated the evangelical mindset of public ministry, particularly through his televised crusades, support of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s racial reconciliation work, and religious council of every president

between Truman and Obama (Sutton, 2013; Thurston, 2000). His work was a crucial effort in publicizing and solidifying evangelical belief's place into popular culture (Thurston, 2000). Meanwhile, fundamentalists, as exemplified by Carl McIntire and the ACCC, denounced the social movements, separated from mainstream culture, and encouraged fellow fundamentalists to take uncompromising political and social positions, both in the voting booth and within their circles of influence (Sutton, 2013; Thurston, 2000). With evangelicalism and fundamentalism defined, the author will now explore modern evangelicalism in America and its worldview.

Defining Modern Evangelicalism and the Evangelical Worldview

Evangelicalism, as with any religious identity, holds abundant diversity in its form and practice. Evangelicalism includes churches within many different denominations, including, but not limited to, Southern Baptists, Pentecostals, charismatics, Methodists, and independent Bible churches (Bean, 2014). Although diversity exists, there are consistent themes that identify modern evangelical belief and practice. Scholars from various fields who research evangelical history, culture, and practice, such as sociologists, historians, and theologians, identify several beliefs that consistently appear in evangelical worldview. Balmer (2006) identified three criteria for a Christian faith practice to be considered evangelical: the Bible must be considered primary to faithful living; a conversion experience is required for salvation, and proselytization is imperative. Kellstedt and Smidt (1991) provided a bit more nuanced definition. To them, evangelicals are defined by their belief that the Bible is the literal word of God; salvation is possible only through personal acceptance of Jesus as savior;

salvation occurs through a “born-again” experience, and there must be a felt obligation to witness one’s beliefs to others. Bean (2014) similarly held that the defining characteristics of evangelicalism are the “authority of the Bible, Christ’s atoning sacrifice on the cross, need for personal commitment to Christ, and need for all believers to participate actively in religious mission” (p. 19). Gallagher (2004) affirmed these identifying beliefs, and added another: responsibility of husbands to be the spiritual head of the household.

Do evangelicals find these definitions from social scientists and historians to be accurate? Judging by the NAE’s definition of evangelicalism, yes. The NAE defines evangelicalism through four characteristics, which are all interrelated. The first is conversionism, which is described as “the belief that lives need to be transformed through a ‘born-again’ experience and a life-long commitment to following Jesus” (NAE, 2018a, para. 3). The term “born again Christian” is derived from John 3, in which Jesus told a man named Nicodemus that no person can access the Kingdom of God unless they are “born again,” not through a physical birth, but through a spiritual rebirth (John 3:1-21). Many evangelicals utilize the Apostle Paul’s letters to the churches in Rome and Ephesus (e.g., Romans and Ephesians) to understand how this spiritual rebirth takes place. Generally, requirements for conversion, or this spiritual rebirth, include a recognition that all humans are imperfect and thus separated from God(e.g., sinners), that the penalty for sin is death and/or eternal punishment, and that Jesus Christ died on the cross to spare repentant humans from death and/or eternal punishment (Peterson, 2016).

The NAE's second and third characteristics of evangelicalism are heavily connected to the characteristic of conversionism. Cruicentrism, the second characteristic, is a "stress on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as making possible the redemption of humanity" (NAE, 2018a, para. 6). That is, for a person to be an evangelical, they must believe that Jesus lived a life free from sin, was sacrificed via crucifixion, and that he was resurrected from the dead for the salvation of humanity (NAE, 2018a). The third characteristic the NAE identifies is activism, or the "expression and demonstration of the Gospel in missionary and social reform efforts" (NAE, 2018a). Social reform and missionary efforts are aimed at proselytization of "non-Believers" (e.g., non-Christians), and can take many different forms: missionary trips to engage local or foreign cultures and share the message of Jesus' sacrifice, or by voting on relevant social issues in a way that is perceived as protecting America and its citizens from the influence of sin.

The conversionism, cruicentrism, and activism characteristics are all rooted in the NAE's final characteristic of evangelicalism: biblicism, or the "high regard for and obedience to the Bible as the ultimate authority" (NAE, 2018a, para. 5). Biblicism is founded in the principal of *sola scriptura* or the belief that scriptures alone, as opposed to church tradition or personal judgment, are trustworthy and sufficient for doctrinal authority (Balmer, 2006). That is, without the Bible, it is impossible to discern the will of God or right living in a sinful world. As the reader may notice, these four criteria, biblicism, conversionism, cruicentrism, and activism, are quite similar to Bean's (2014), Balmer's (2006), Kellstedt and Smidt's (1991), and Gallagher's (2004) definition of evangelicalism.

In partnership with LifeWay Research, the NAE created the Evangelical Beliefs Research Definition (EBRD), for researchers to use to identify evangelicals (NAE, n.d.). The EBRD is based on their four criteria for evangelicalism and is significant as it is created *by* evangelicals *for* the purpose or research, thus giving social scientists a guide for measuring evangelical beliefs that limits potential personal bias. The NAE believes this measure can provide a consistent standard for social scientists to identify evangelicals in an accurate and meaningful way (NAE, n.d.). The EBRD consists of four statements that are to be ranked on a four-point, Likert-type scale (strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, and strongly disagree). Those who strongly agree with all four statements are categorized as evangelical (NAE, n.d.). These statements are the following:

- The Bible is the highest authority for what I believe.
- It is very important for me personally to encourage non-Christians to trust Jesus Christ as their Savior.
- Jesus Christ's death on the cross is the only sacrifice that could remove the penalty of my sin.
- Only those who trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Savior receive God's free gift of eternal salvation.

In these four statements, one can see the NAE's emphasis on conversionism, activism, biblicalism, and cruicentrism, as well as Bean's (2014), Balmer's (2006), Kellstedt and Smidt's (1991), and Gallagher's (2004) understanding of evangelicalism. However, evangelicalism is more than just the possession of a certain set of beliefs; it is

also a social identity. The author will explore the concept of evangelicalism as a social identity in the following section.

Evangelicalism as a Social Identity

Evangelicalism is more than a religious belief or practice; it is a social identity that has the ability to inform the development and expression of one's other social identities, including those related to politics, gender, and sexuality (Bracey & Moore, 2017; Crockett, Cashwell, Marszalek, & Willis, 2018; Wood & Conley, 2014).

Race and Evangelicalism

In this study, the author will examine the experiences of participants who identify as white evangelicals. It is important to note that evangelical beliefs are not held exclusively by one particular racial or cultural group. The Pew Research Center (2015) noted that, while three-quarters of evangelicals identify as white, the percentages of evangelicals who identify as Black and Hispanic are growing. However, researchers and historians have noted that evangelical churches, like Protestant churches at large, are still noticeably divided by racial and cultural identities (Bracey & Moore, 2017). This may be in part because white evangelicalism is its own social location "in which the demographics and religio-cultural norms" reflect and operate within a privileged worldview (Bracey & Moore, 2017, p. 284); that is, white evangelical churches are a white institutional space, in which the demographics and social norms operate to the advantage and comfort of white people. That is, the style of preaching, music, length and structure of services, dress code, political and community activities, worldview, missionary interests, rules around emotional expression, and theological emphases are

informed by European cultural norms and the forces of systemic white privilege (Bracey & Moore, 2017; Edwards, 2008). Notably, all of these aspects of church are "tailored to reach the 'unchurched whites" (Bracey & Moore, 2017, p. 284), further targeting a particular in-group; that is, they are seeking to invite, encourage participation, and retain white church goers. Racial and cultural identities inform every aspect of the institutional organization culture within white evangelicalism, which includes the forces of white privilege, power, systemic oppression, and accumulation of resources (Bracey and Moore, 2017; Moore, 2008). As an institution, white evangelical churches serve an important role, spiritually and emotionally, in shaping the white evangelical social identity; thus, many white evangelicals desire to "protect" this space from perceived threats (Bracey & Moore, 2017).

Bracey and Moore (2017) suggested that the presence of "race tests" in white evangelical churches further evidence the idea that white evangelicalism is its own social identity. Bracey and Moore (2017) explained that race tests are ways in which white evangelicals protect their institutional space from external threats. Race tests are performances conducted by white individuals and groups in the presence of people of color – particularly people of color who are "guests" or "newcomers" into the space (Bracey & Moore, 2017). These performances utilize racial microaggressions to preclude or influence people of color's participation in predominately white social spaces. For example, Bracey and Moore (2017) offer an example from Bracey's, a black, Christian man, fieldnotes; the greeter of the white evangelical church he attended for his study shared that she had been "praying for a bla- man that could step in and be a father figure

to a young [biracial] child" (p. 290). Bracey and Moore (2017) explain that this one example of a utility race test, which denotes a belief that warm welcomes are contingent upon the church's need for a new racial "other" for a specific purpose within the church. Bracey and Moore (2017) also describe the use of exclusionary race tests, which were identified as seemingly random acts of bigotry that were employed in systemic ways to maintain the boundaries between white individuals and the "out-group" threat. For example, Bracey cites one "community group" (a small Bible study group that meets in someone's home) member being asked to start the group with a random fact about oneself; he, and each white male who followed, responded with their favorite model of gun (Bracey & Moore, 2017). Bracey also reported a time when another set of group leaders, clearly expecting a white male to join them, proudly showed him, a person of color, photographs of ancestors in their Confederate uniforms. In the seven churches investigated for his study, Bracey stated all seven the white evangelical churches he visited, in four different states across the United States, performed some form of race test, with four of the seven performing exclusionary race tests.

Although Bracey and Moore (2017) recognized that cultural differences between white and black churches and the tendency of people of color to prefer to be in positions of power in identity-affirming spaces, lead to racial segregation in Protestant churches, they argued that the race tests perpetuate the racial segregation of Protestant churches. This further evidences that white evangelicalism is a distinct social identity and this might be a reason why, even fifty years after the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s observation still rings true, "One of the shameful

tragedies [of our nation], is that eleven o'clock on Sunday morning is one of the most segregated hours, if not the most segregated hour, in Christian America" (Spivak, 1960, p. 435).

White evangelicalism's socio-political stances. The Pew Research Center (2014), as well as historians and social scientists (Balmer, 2006; Brint & Abrutyn, 2010; Gallagher, 2004; Wilcox & Larson, 2006) have noted that there are several social and political stances that white evangelicals tend to take; these largely center around human sexuality and are derived from evangelicals' interpretation of the Bible. It is important to note that these positions, which will be outlined in more detail below, are not unanimous among white evangelicals and, as with any group, individuals within that identity can have nuanced and differing beliefs, thoughts, and values than the trends of the group as a whole. In this study, the author will use the trends of the group to aid in her understanding of the individual participant's context, acknowledging that not every participant will think, believe, or value the same ideas and convictions of the group. However, due to social commentary and perceptions of the white evangelical identity and worldview, outlined in more detail later in this chapter, it is important to delineate the specific social and political stances white evangelicals tend to take and how these stances were developed by the group. The author will strive to give a thorough yet succinct summarization of three major political and social stances and how these stances were formed, as well as the critical reception of the stances so that readers may understand the participants' social context. These three stances were chosen specifically to explore out of a myriad of social-political issues that could have been selected, as they are

consistently regarded in relevant literature as the most universally identifying and central in the white evangelical worldview (Balmer, 2006; Bolz-Weber, 2019; Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood [CBMW], 2017; NAE, 2009; NAE, 2012). Utilizing resources from social scientists and historians, as well as primary texts from white evangelical organizations and individuals, the author will attempt to give readers a synthesized and critical analysis of relevant literature.

Abortion. Evangelicalism has a long and complex history with the issue of abortion, though Balmer (2006) stated that many white evangelicals may not know about that history. Many white evangelicals believe that the issue of abortion in America was a direct response to Roe v Wade, a landmark legal case that took place in 1973, in which the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) ruled that the U.S. Constitution protects a pregnant woman's right to choose to end a pregnancy without excessive government restriction (Blackmun & SCOTUS, 1973). Many leaders in the Religious Right today maintain that abortion was the founding cause of the Religious Right's organization and became part of their platform immediately following the Roe v Wade ruling (Balmer, 2006). However, Balmer (2006) stated that this narrative is not entirely accurate. Although various Roman Catholic groups denounced the ruling and articles were run in the evangelical publication *Christianity Today* in opposition to the ruling, the majority of evangelical leaders said "virtually nothing about Roe v Wade" (Balmer, 2006, p.12) and many of those who did comment applauded the decision. Balmer (2006) explained that the leaders within the Religious Right's intentionally selected abortion as a political and social issue for the Religious Right to support, not because it was a

theologically significant issue, but because they believed it would likely get the most attention and support from the voters to whom they were attempting to appeal. These leaders hoped that, by including abortion in their political platform, the voters would unify and support other issues they deemed important and vote in candidates who supported their agenda. Regardless of how abortion came to become a well-known issue for the Religious Right, it makes up a considerable portion of the white evangelical worldview and social identity.

Most white evangelicals tend to take an anti-abortion or "pro-life" stance (PRC, 2014). Some make exceptions in cases where the pregnancy is the result of rape or incest, or when the mother's life is in danger, while others believe that abortion for any reason is an act of infanticide. The NAE's public position on abortion states that "abortion on demand for reasons of personal convenience, social adjustment, or economic advantage is morally wrong, and the NAE expresses its firm opposition to any legislation designed to make abortion possible for these reasons" (NAE, 2009, n.p.). Whatever their specific position, white evangelicals' stances on abortion tend to be rooted in their beliefs about the "sanctity of life" (NAE, 2009, n.p.). That is, since God created all human beings in his image (Genesis 1-2), and God takes a personal interest and care into each individual before they are born (Psalm 139:13), and all humans share "divine dignity" (NAE, 2009). This, combined with God's love for children (Deuteronomy 31:19-20; Luke 18:16), makes abortion a violation of God's will for humanity (NAE, 2009). Thus, a pro-life stance is imperative to many white evangelicals on two levels: one, as an opportunity to later present the Gospel to the fetuses that would have been terminated, and, second, as a

way of preventing God's judgment on the United States and its citizens for allowing legalized abortions

LGB rights and "threats to the sanctity of marriage." Similar to the issue of abortion, there is not a particular stance that all white evangelicals take on LGB rights; white evangelicals range in their theology from liberal and affirming to conservative and non-affirming. Although the evangelical landscape is generally becoming more supportive of LGB rights, including marriage and ordination of LGB-identifying pastors, evangelicals have historically trended to unsupportive and non-affirming (Balmer, 2006; Smith, 2017). If holding an non-affirming stance, evangelicals tend to cite Leviticus 18:22, the story of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 14, Matthew 19, Hebrews 13, and passages from the Apostle Paul's letters to Rome (Romans 1:26-27), Corinthians (1 Corinthians 6:9-10), and Timothy (1 Timothy 1:10) as evidence for the sinful nature of "homosexuality"[2] (Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, 2017). For many white evangelicals, the passages referenced previously show God's intention for human sexuality: sex should take place within the confines of monogamous marriage between heterosexual, cisgendered couples with the primary motivations being procreation and emotional intimacy (CBMW, 2017; NAE, 2012). With this in mind, white evangelicals generally see gay individuals, relationships, and marriages as threats to the sanctity (e.g., sacredness) of marriage (CBMW, 2017; NAE, 2012). Like the issue of abortion, social

[2] Please note, the author will use the term "homosexuality" throughout this portion of the text as quoted from the primary material from evangelical organizations. This term is generally considered outdated and offensive to many LGB communities for its stigmatization and reduction of individuals to their sexual preferences (GLAAD, 2012). GLAAD recommends using the adjective "gay" as a shorthand term when describing gay, lesbian and bisexual orientations; as such, when the author is not quoting texts, she will use the terms "LGB-identifying," "LGB communities," or "gay" as appropriate (GLAAD, 2012).

reform efforts that abolish and/or prevent marriage between LGB individuals, LGB partners as beneficiaries of insurance claims and legal procedures, and ordination of openly gay pastors are seen as proselytization on two levels. First, it can be seen as a way of "saving" LGB individuals from their sin, and, second, it prevents God's judgment on America for allowing sin to take place (e.g., Sodom and Gomorrah; CBMW, 2017).

Trans rights and gender. Similar to LGB issues, evangelicals tend to take a non-affirming stance towards individuals who identify as transgender. Utilizing Bible passages from Genesis 1 and 2, Leviticus 18:22, Romans 1:18-32, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and 11:14-15, and Deuteronomy 22:5, white evangelicals tend to believe that transgenderism is in direct contradiction to God's intention for humanity to live within a gender binary with a specific understanding of how gender is to be enacted (CBMW, 2017). The Nashville Statement, a statement of faith written by the evangelical organization the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, was written and published in 2017 as the topic of transgenderism became a focal point in the news and media following Caitlyn Jenner's transition and the passing of several "Bathroom Bills" across the United States to prevent trans individuals from using the gendered bathroom of their preference. The Nashville Statement, written to "witness publicly . . . the good purposes of God for human sexuality [as] revealed in Christian Scripture" (CBMW, 2017, p. 1), offers 14 articles, each featuring a theologically driven affirmation and a denial statement, related to the topics of gender, sexuality, marriage, and affirmation of LGBTQ+ identifying individuals and communities. Seven of 14 articles address

transgenderism specifically. Articles of note include Article 4 and 7 which state, respectively, the following:

- We affirm that divinely ordained differences between male and female reflect God's original creation design and are meant for human good and human flourishing. We deny that such differences are a result of the Fall or are a tragedy to be overcome. (CBMW, 2017, p. 2)
- We affirm that self-conception as male or female should be defined by God's holy purposes in creation and redemption as revealed in Scripture. We deny that adopting a homosexual or transgender self-conception is consistent with God's holy purposes in creation and redemption. (CBMW, 2017, p. 3).

The Nashville Statement was signed by numerous evangelical organizations, pastors, social media influencers, and leaders. This document provides not only a clear outline of evangelical belief around transgenderism, but it also provides a clear depiction of the NAE's characteristics of evangelicalism. Present in this document are scriptural references (biblicalism) upon which the articles are based, an emphasis on Jesus's sacrifice and his redemptive power for all (cruicentrism and conversionism), as well as claims that this document is intended to be a missionary and social reform effort (activism).

For all of these political/social stances (abortion, LGB rights, and Trans rights), one can see the impact of all four defining characteristics of evangelicalism: an emphasis on biblicalism, cruicentrism, conversionism, and activism. In examining both the defining characteristics of evangelism and the application of these characteristics to the socio-

political climate, by its current nature evangelism seems to require political action. This evidences evangelicalism's position as not just a religious identity, but a social identity as well: *white evangelicalism's defining characteristics motivate its followers to take social and political action*.

Reception of Evangelical Worldview

As mentioned earlier, the socio-political stances evangelicals tend to take have a varied reaction in the general public, particularly since the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States. The evangelical worldview garners mixed responses from within the Protestant faith tradition and outside of it. Although there are many different reactions to white evangelical's socio-political trends, two particularly relevant reactions include a rebuttal to white evangelical's biblicism and white evangelical's association, in some circles, with white nationalism. This section will explore both of these critical responses.

Biblical Selective Literalism

Critics of the evangelical worldview have argued that evangelicals tend to embrace selective biblical literalism, in which certain verses and passages are selected, emphasized, and interpreted literally, with the intention of drawing and maintaining boundaries between evangelicals and non-evangelicals; or, in other terms, delineating the in-group from the out-group (Balmer, 2006). Critics chose the term "selective literalism" to emphasize that there are some passages within the Bible that evangelicals understand and apply literally (Balmer, 2006). Meanwhile, other texts, sometimes from the same chapter or written by the same author, are de-emphasized and encouraged to be read

within the cultural context of the ancient Hebrew or Roman tradition (Balmer, 2006). An example commonly cited is Paul's admonition to the women in the Church to cover their hair while praying (1 Corinthians 14:4-6). This tends to be attributed to cultural differences between first century Rome and not applied literally. Meanwhile, three chapters later in 1 Corinthians 14:34 and also in 1 Timothy 2, Paul stated that women are to be silent in churches, refraining from asking questions or teaching. These passages, despite their same authorship, tend to be interpreted and applied literally, some churches and denominations preventing women from accepting teaching and leadership roles (Balmer, 2006). Balmer (2006) states that by designating certain actions as particularly egregious or sinful, white evangelicals externalize the "enemy," placing "themselves on the morally correct side of whatever lines they draw" between right and wrong (p. 10). Balmer (2006) cited the issues of divorce and homosexuality as a perfect example of this externalization: despite multiple New Testament passages in which Jesus denounces divorce, evangelicals tend to ignore divorce as a sin, in the pulpit and in their social reform efforts, because "too many Christians . . . [have] transgressed this boundary themselves" (p. 10), thus making the line between the in-group and out-group too ambiguous. Balmer (2006) went on to state that passages on homosexuality tend to be emphasized, in both the pulpit and social reform efforts, so that evangelicals "can pretend [it] exists only in the 'secular' world" (pg 10), delineating the in-group and the out-group more clearly. For many outside the white evangelical subculture, this community's stance on biblicism seems to be a way of judging others, promoting hate, and separating people from God (Bolz-Weber, 2019).

White Evangelicals, Trump, and White Nationalism

White evangelicals, who make up roughly one-fifth of all registered voters and one-third of all voters who support the GOP (PRC, 2016), overwhelmingly voted for Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election (Smith, 2017). Exit polls from the 2016 election indicate that 81% of white evangelicals voted for Trump. His approval rating among this group has remained high throughout his presidency despite rather controversial behavior and decisions (Schwadel & Smith, 2019). For example, around the 100-day mark of Trump's presidency, 75% of white evangelicals approved of Trump's handling of the presidency, which was nearly twice as high as the general public's approval rating (39%; Smith, 2017). In 2019, two years later, nearly 70% of white evangelicals reported that they approve of the way Trump is handling the presidency (Schwadel & Smith, 2019), while the general public maintained a 39% approval rating, citing his behavior towards people of color, women, LGBTQ communities, and other marginalized groups as a reason for this low percentage (Gallup, 2019).

Why do white evangelicals like Trump? Zazumer (2019) conducted a series of interviews with 50 evangelicals from three battleground states—Florida, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin—help explain this phenomena: Trump is a president who "acts like a bully but fights for their beliefs" in a time where white evangelicals feel mocked and threatened for their beliefs (n.p). One interviewee stated, "You've just got to accept the bad with the good" in reference to Trump's racist statements and being accused of sexually assaulting numerous women (Zazumer, 2019). White evangelicals tend to see Trump as a brash protector of the evangelical faith and social identity. For critics of white

evangelicalism, this is difficult to accept, particularly with Christianity's portrayal of Jesus as a loving and accepting figure of historically marginalized populations (e.g., the sick, poor, women, children, and immigrants).

One of the more disturbing developments that Trump has been charged with is contributing to is the rise of white nationalism in America (Goldberg, 2019; Serwer, 2019). In his testimony before the U.S. Senate in July 2019, FBI Director Christopher Wray stated, "The majority of domestic terrorism cases that we've investigated [since 2016] are motivated by some version of what you might call white supremacist violence" (Bush, 2019, n.p). The Christian Science Monitor reported that although global terrorist attacks around the world have receded since 2014, the United States has seen a surge in domestic terrorism. In 2006, there were six terror-related incidents in the United States; in 2017, there were 65 (Jonsson & Bruinius, 2019). Of these, 37 were tied to anti-Muslim, anti-Semitic, or other racist, xenophobic, and white nationalist motivations (Jonsson & Bruinius, 2019). More recent examples of these domestic terrorist cases can be seen in the attack at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston in 2015; the fatal car attack against peaceful protestors at an alt-right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017; the 2018 shooting at Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburg; and, most recently, the 2019 shooting in El Paso that deliberately targeted the Latino community.

The white nationalist problem in America certainly goes beyond Trump; the FBI stated that the rise in white nationalism in rooted in demographic shifts and changes in location of power, and is a transnational phenomenon (Zazumer, 2019). White nationalism is rooted in systemic racism and oppression that is woven into the foundation

and history of America—beginning with the genocide of native peoples and the transatlantic slave trade (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2020).

However, many believe that Trump's rhetoric and rise in power has played a crucial role in inspiring the current wave of white nationalist violence, or as Beauchamp (2019) stated, "turning inchoate anxiety about demographic change into real, deadly action" (n.p.). Leaders in white evangelical culture are responding to these evaluations of Trump largely by defending him or through silence on the topic, leading critics of white evangelicalism to question the motivations and morality of white evangelicals as a whole. The divisiveness in the United States around Trump and white evangelicals' support of Trump has many implications for counselors-in-training and counselor educators, which will be explored in more depth later in this chapter.

As mentioned earlier, there is variance in the white evangelical socio-political stances, just as there is diversity in every population. Not all white evangelicals are anti-abortion, oppose diverse gender expression, support President Trump, or are white nationalists, and the author certainly is not proposing that this is the case. Instead, the author is offering these trends in white evangelicals' sociopolitical stances and their critical reception as this gives the context in which white evangelical are received. Later in the chapter, the author will explore in more detail the higher education environment, which tends to be more "secular" and liberal; as such white evangelical counselors-in-training will likely find themselves facing the aforementioned critical reception.

Social Identity Theory and Evangelicalism

Thus far in Chapter II, the author has explored the history of evangelicalism and demonstrated how evangelicalism is a social identity that impacts other socio-political identities. Before exploring how the evangelical identity is relevant to counselors-in-training and counselor education, the author will explain how social identities function on a theoretical level. To do this, the author will utilize Burke and Stets (2000; 2009)'s text on Social Identity Theory (SIT), as it is a foundational work that consolidates over 40 years' of work by many social scientists. Notable works that Burke and Stets (2009) explored include Sheldon Stryker's structural symbolic interaction (Stryker, 1980); George McCall and J.L. Simmons foundational work exploring role identities and the salience hierarchy of role identities (McCall & Simmons, 1979); as well as Peter J. Burke's focus on the internal operating dynamics of identities (Burke, 1980; Burke & Reitzes, 1981; Burke & Tully, 1977). SIT has been used in many disciplines, including psychology, social work, and sociology, to explore a wide variety of identity-related conflicts, including recent studies exploring the role identity expectations of Turkish Hizbullah terrorists (Cinolu, 2008); the readjustment processes for Iraq War veterans (Signmon, 2011); the construction and negotiation of social identities in neighborhood associations (Wade, 2009); and gay identity development and sense of parental competence in gay fathers (Rizzi, 2014).

The following section will explore and synthesize the nuances of SIT before it is applied to this particular study.

Basics of Social Identity Theory

One of the most foundational components of SIT is the notion that the self is reflexive; that is, it sees itself as an object that can categorize, classify, or name itself in relation to other social categories/classifications (Burke & Stets, 2000). When the self practices reflexivity with the intention of understanding oneself within the context of a group, it is called identity formation. Identity formation is made up of two processes: self-categorization and social comparison (Burke & Stets, 2000). Self-categorization occurs when a person emphasizes the perceived similarities between oneself and other in-group members, and accentuates the perceived differences between self and out-group members (Burke & Stets, 2000). These comparisons occur across attitudes, beliefs, values, affective reactions, behavioral norms, styles of speech, and any other property that is believed to be correlated to group membership (Burke & Stets, 2000). Meanwhile, social comparison, the second process in identity formation, is a cognitive process by which people who are similar with oneself are labeled *in-group* and people who differ from the self are labeled *out-group* (Burke & Stets, 2000). Identity formation occurs at both unconscious and conscious levels, but it is important to remember that the individual can exert control over this process at all times (Burke & Stets, 2009).

In-group members are established on the basis of uniformity of perception among group members. The uniformity of perception is revealed through a group member's cognitions, attitudes, and behavior. Examples of uniformity of perception in cognitions can be seen through stereotyping other groups and seeing oneself as "prototypical" in the group; that is, one perceives other people in their group to be just like them. Examples of

uniformity of perception in attitudes can be seen in one's evaluation of in-groups and out-groups; this might occur when an individual continues to make uniform, positive evaluations of their group despite evidence of wrongdoing by an individual within their in-group identity, yet makes uniform negative evaluations of the out-group based one person's actions. Uniformity of perception in behavior includes the phenomenon of groupthink (Burke & Stets, 2000). When social identities become activated, uniformity of perception and depersonalization can occur. This means that a person in the "out-group" is divested of human characteristics or individuality by an "in-group" member. This basic process is what underlies social stereotyping, group cohesiveness, and ethnocentrism (Burke & Stets, 2000).

The social identities that humans adopt are mechanisms of society and exist *only* in relation to other contrasting categories (Burke & Stets, 2000). For example, higher socioeconomic statuses exist as a social identity because it has meaning in comparison to lower socioeconomic statuses (Burke & Stets, 2000). These social categories are defined by the amount of power, privilege, and status they occupy; individuals are born into a society that has already negotiated the power, privilege, and status of the specific identities that they occupy (e.g., race, gender, socioeconomic status; Burke & Stets, 2000).

To complicate matters, every person is a member of a unique combination of social categories and identities; each person's self-concept is unique and results in intersectionality (Burke & Stets, 2000). What happens when two or more social identities are activated at the same time? It depends on the salience of each identity (Burke & Stets,

2009; 2009). Salience is the psychological significance of a group membership and is tied to social requirements of the situation and individual. Depending on the salience hierarchy (e.g., a hierarchical composition of identities that dictate which identities take precedence when verification is needed), the person will decide which role or identity is prioritized in a given situation. Social identities must be verified. If they are not, the individual will encounter cognitive dissonance and a host of negative outcomes associated with this phenomenon. The salience hierarchy helps the individual decide which identity to attend to in a given situation, which is described in greater detail in the next section.

Components of a Social Identity

An identity is composed of four basic components: an input, an identity standard, a comparator, and an output, which are composed within a cyclical arrangement. That is, once the output is produced, it informs the input and the cycle begins again. This cycle operates in a homeostatic and conservative fashion to maintain the perceived self-meanings within a certain range, much like a thermostat. This means that social identities, and their related meanings and perceptions, are constantly being monitored and controlled. The goal of this cycle is to validate an identity in which a person's in-group or social identity is confirmed by their perceptions of the environment; that is, their environment confirms who they believe themselves to be (Burke & Stets, 2000).

The Cycle

The social identity cycle begins with an input, which is some type of perception in the environment that activates an identity. Perceptions are central to identity process as

they are the situational meanings and cues that activate an identity. An input can be one's reaction to their own behavior, someone else's actions, or the perception of someone's reaction to the them (Burke & Stets, 2000). After an input activates an identity, it is then processed by the identity standard, which is a set of meanings that an individual uses to define an identity. These standards are culturally derived and consist of the "rules" or meanings of what it means to belong to a particular in-group. For example, for the social identity of "man," the identity standard might hold meanings such as, "tough," "does not cry," or "strong." For each identity, there is a separate standard; within one person, there might be separate identity standards for race, culture, profession, gender, and religion. Identity standards can also be thought of as goals: the individual wants to achieve the identity standard and can become distressed to various degrees when they do not enact the identity standard in the way they feel they are supposed to; that is, a person who holds the identity of "man" might become distressed if he were to cry in a public setting (Burke & Stets, 2009).

Once the input activates an identity and the identity standard has paired the input with the corresponding meanings, the comparator then compares the two (input and identity standard) to evaluate the degree to which they are compatible and consistent with one another. The comparator will then send an output, which is behavioral and emotional response. The type of output that is produced depends on if the comparator determines if the input and standard are consistent. If the input is not consistent with the standard, the comparator will send an "error signal" which will then produce an output that is meant to alter the environment in such a way that produces a more compatible result. The error

signal also produces emotional byproducts; there is a level of distress that occurs depending on the degree of incongruence between the input and standard, and this serves as motivation to take action. When the input and standard match, a level of satisfaction and/or happiness occurs which then serves to reinforce the identity and its standard (Burke & Stets, 2009).

Example of cycle. Tom is a counselor-in-training who identifies as a man and holds in his identity standard that men are not to show weaknesses. In one of his classes, the content activates an emotional reaction in Tom, and he begins to cry in front of his peers, who notice and attempt to support him. The input of crying in the classroom is then compared to the identity standard, which says that men cannot cry in public spaces. An error signal is produced, which then triggers an output: Tom feels embarrassment and shame, and responds with a sarcastic, self-deprecating remark that is designed to make his classmates laugh and distract them from his emotional state. The intention of this output is to change his perception of himself so that it is more aligned with the identity standard. Tom notices his classmates' laughter, which then begins a new rotation through the social identity cycle, in which their laughter is evaluated by the system and produces a new output.

Identity Verification Failure

When an identity is regularly not verified, or there is consistent incongruence between the perception of the environment and standard, cognitive dissonance and stress are present (Burke & Stets, 2009). This stress results from an interruption of normal action and thought processes, causing an autonomic stress response and emotional and

behavioral responses. There are two causes of identity verification failure: when a specific identity cannot be verified in a specific environment, and when two or more identity standards hold oppositional meanings. In the first scenario, when an individual blames themselves for not being able to verify their identity standard in a specific environment, negative feelings and blame are directed inward. Using the example of Tom, he might think, "Something is wrong with me because I've cried several times in this class." When the individual feels that actors are to blame for the identity disruption, negative feelings are directed outwards. For Tom, this might be, "My professor keeps targeting me; she wants to embarrass me in front of my classmates." When an individual cannot consistently predict the perceptions in the environment and does not feel that their identity is validated in a given environment, they must find a way to either reestablish the normal identity cycle, or embrace a new identity that is supported in the environment. Reestablishing the normal identity cycle can take three possible forms: leaving the environment that causes identity verification failure; explaining, renegotiating, or manipulating the environment so that the distress is no longer felt; or rearranging the status of the environment so that it is no longer valuable or important to be accepted there (Burke & Stets, 2009). Embracing a new identity might look like changing one's identity standard to make exceptions for the previously unacceptable behavior. In the second scenario, when different identity standards require oppositional meanings, the system is put into an impossible situation: one or both standards cannot be verified. In this case, the identity standard itself must shift and/or change to remove the conflict. In other words, people must re-identify themselves (Burke & Stets, 2009).

This idea of identity verification, and the consequences of failure to verify one's identity either due to environment or competing standards, holds particular relevance to counselor education in relation to students who identify as evangelical. As discussed earlier in this chapter, white evangelicalism is a social identity, with its own parameters around in-group membership and the beliefs and social causes that in-group members should take. Students are arriving in counselor education programs with this identity, and it is possible that they may find the counselor education environment as one that consistently fails to verify their identities as both white evangelical and counselor. This could lead to adoption of different identity standards or completely different identities, and students will likely be riddled with stress and the negative effects of cognitive dissonance. In the last section of this chapter, this idea will be explored in greater detail.

Counselor Education

Supportive learning environments are critical for student growth, development, and learning (Edmondson, 1999; Garvin, Edmondson, & Gino, 2008; Giordano, Bevly, Tucker, & Prosek, 2018). One component of a supportive learning environment is psychological safety. Edmondson (1999) in her landmark study, defined psychological safety as the implicit confidence that members of a group or organization will not punish or embarrass another group member for asking questions, disclosing a mistake, or voicing an opinion. Edmondson (1999) found that psychological safety significantly predicted organizational learning. Another important component of supportive learning environments is the appreciation of differences, which is when differing opinions and worldviews are openly shared and valued (Garvin et al., 2008). Both of these constructs

are relevant to counselor education, as students with varying identities are placed in cohorts or classroom environments in which they are expected learn together (Giordano et al., 2018).

Creating a supportive learning environment, including establishing an appreciation of differences and psychological safety, can be difficult for counselor educators to create, especially around conversations related to religion, spirituality, and values (Giordano et al., 2018). As Snodgrass and Noronha (2015) reported, any mental health professional engaged in work around spirituality and religion with clients "occupies a perilous position when approaching others with . . . anything other than curiosity and questions" (p. 141) as they may unduly impart their own values on the client. As such, many counselor educators approach addressing counselors-in-training's spiritual and religious identities by encouraging their students to keep their values and belief systems private (Parament, 2007). It is possible for counselor educators, while attempting to protect clients from imposition of clinician values, to impart the message that students' religious and spiritual identities are not welcome in the classroom. Additionally, counselor educators tend to lean more left in the political spectrum (Parikh, Ceballos, & Post, 2013; Steele, Bischof, & Craig, 2014), while evangelicals tend to lean more right (Green, 2009; PRC 2014). Though it is likely unintentional, it is possible that students who identify as evangelical could feel excluded in counselor education learning environments (Giordano et al., 2018). Compartmentalization of religious and spiritual identities within an individual has the potential to leave individuals more vulnerable to mental health issues (Paragment, 2007). Thus, if counselors-in-training are experiencing

identity invalidation, they could be experiencing a host of negative effects including cognitive dissonance, which could impair their ability to learn and provide competent clinical practice to their clients. With this in mind, counselor educators could benefit from better understanding how their evangelical students' identities are being validated or invalidated in the counselor education environment in an effort to create appropriately supportive and challenging learning environments.

Conclusion

In Chapter II, the author has explored the topics of religion and spirituality, the social identity of evangelicalism, how social identities function, and how the counselor education environment could be difficult for evangelical students to navigate. In Chapter III, the author will propose a study to explore the experiences of evangelical students in counselor education environments.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Introduction

Chapter I introduced the topic of religious identities in counselors and the difficulties counselors who are religious might face in counselor education programs. Chapter II explored in more detail the nuances of social identities, particularly that of white evangelicalism, and the ways in which counselor education may not verify the white evangelical identity. In Chapter III, the author outlines the study as initially proposed, indicating the design, research questions, participants, procedures, and method of analysis.

Research Design

The researcher utilized Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore the lived experiences of current or formerly evangelical-identifying counselors in their counselor training program. IPA, formed and described by Smith (1996; 2004; 2011), is a qualitative research method. Researchers using IPA seek to understand the lived experiences of participants and adopt an "insider's perspective" of the phenomenon under study (Conrad, 1987). IPA is a good fit for research questions that are concerned with "understanding an experience of significant import" (Eatough & Smith, 2017, p. 3) especially those experiences that are existential in nature and require significant meaning-making of the individual. As the researcher was proposing to study how a meaning-

making structure (e.g., social identity) is affected within a specific environment (e.g., counselor training program), the researcher believed IPA methodology would be advantageous to the research endeavor.

Smith (1996; 2004; 2011) emphasized that IPA is structured to explore and understand participants' personal perceptions of a lived experience as opposed to producing an objective statement about the experience. That is, IPA is an interpretation of the participants' interpretation. By focusing on participants' perceptions, the researcher is able to identify common themes in a shared experience without sacrificing the individuality of each participant and individual participant's voice (Smith, 2004). This focus was especially imperative in this study, as religion is an intensely personal experience that affects various aspects of one's life and, although there are trends white evangelicals tend to follow in their socio-political beliefs (e.g., stances on abortion), the ways in which each individual enacts their white evangelical social identity is unique. It would follow, then, that the ways in which each participant's white evangelical social identities are affected by counselor education would vary, likely in nuanced ways. The researcher sought to utilize a methodology that could capture the themes of the experience, the diversity of participants' lived experience, and the meaning they derived from their experience without losing the individual's voice.

Research Question

Smith (2004) encouraged researchers to frame research questions openly and broadly so as to capture both breadth and depth of the observed phenomenon and prevent

researcher bias from negatively influencing the study. As such the research question was as follows:

In what ways do counselor training programs affect white evangelical counselor's social identity as white evangelicals?

There is no *a-priori* hypothesis per IPA methodology, with the goal instead to explore, "flexibly, and in detail," the observed phenomena (Smith, 2004, p. 55).

Participants

Participants in this study included four individuals who identified as counselors and who believed their evangelical identity was affected by their counselor education. Although IPA does not have a standard sample size, Smith and Osborne (2007) recommended utilizing five to six participants to allow time and energy for in-depth analysis of each interview. Participants usually number between one and fifteen, but IPA has been used in studies with 30 participants, per Brocki and Wearden's (2006) comprehensive literature review on research studies that implemented IPA methodology.

To be included in this study, participants had to meet several requirements. First, participants must have graduated from a CACREP-accredited, public university, and were willing to discuss their experiences in their counselor education program. Participants must have graduated from a CACREP-accredited program to ensure that all participants had similar education standards, decreasing variance of experiences within the sample. Similarly, participants must have graduated from a public university to ensure that all participants had similar methods of education (i.e.., homogeneity) – that is, one participant did not attend a private, Christian university that integrates faith and

counseling practice. The researcher intentionally chose to interview graduates of counselor education programs rather than current counselors-in-training as graduates can reflect on the entirety of their experience in their training program. That is, they were able to speak to which parts of their entire experience they found challenging or supportive, rather than speaking from only one or two semesters of experience. Additionally, the participants were able to reflect on how their experiences in the graduate training program have or have not caused changes in their life and/or religious identity after the program ended. This provided a more comprehensive view of the effects of counselor education on white evangelical social identity than current counselors-in-training would have been able to provide. To be interviewed, participants needed to identify as white women. As mentioned in Chapter II, though evangelicalism is not limited to one particular racial or gender identity, white evangelicalism is a specific cultural group that is informed by structures of power and privilege in the United States. As such, the researcher wished to limit the scope of this study to white evangelical women to explore the unique themes and trends within this population, as it may differ greatly from evangelicals who hold other racial and cultural identities.

The participants were provided with two screening statements that they had to affirm to be included in the study. The first statement is, “When I began my counseling training program, I believed that Jesus was the only way to salvation, the Bible held truth on right living, and that I had a responsibility to share the Gospel with others.” This statement required the participant to endorse the identity of an evangelical Christian, per the author’s operational definition of evangelical Christian. The researcher intentionally

did not use the word “Evangelical” in the screening statement for two reasons. First, the term “evangelical” can be polarizing due to the religious and political temperature of the United States at the time of the study. If the term “evangelical” was used in the recruitment materials, the researcher was concerned potential participants who meet the criteria of white evangelical may choose not to engage in the study for fear of being stereotyped or misconstrued. By listing the beliefs of the evangelical doctrine, informed by an NAE approved-definition (NAE, 2018a), the researcher hoped to recruit participants in a manner that avoids fear of judgment. Second, the researcher avoided the word “evangelical” because participants could be unaware that their beliefs fall under the category of evangelical. By listing beliefs instead of the category, potential participants were more readily able to discern if they qualify for the study. In addition to avoiding the word “evangelical,” the researcher was also intentional about framing the statement around the counselor’s identity at the time the participant began their training program. It is possible that counselors who began their program identifying as evangelical did not end their program that way, and the researcher did not want to limit the sample to only those who continue to identify as evangelical.

The second statement participants needed to affirm was: “My counselor training program profoundly affected my relationship with God, my faith community, and/or my identity as a Christian, positively or negatively.” This statement confirmed the participant’s personal experience with the topic of the study, rather than an intellectual interest in the topic. Since the researcher was interested in the various and nuanced experiences of white evangelical counselors-in-training while in their programs, the

researcher wanted to potential participants to know that both affirming and challenging experiences are welcomed in this study.

Once these statements are confirmed, the participants also agreed to have their interview audio/video recorded. The sample was selected through invitations through social media platforms and listservs and, after initial participants were interviewed, the researcher utilized snowball sampling methods, such as asking the participants to share this opportunity with other individuals, until sample size was sufficient.

Procedures

The researcher created a Qualtrics pre-screening questionnaire that required potential participants to share their contact information, affirm or deny the screening statements, and gather demographic data, including information on their racial/cultural identities as well as information on their counselor training program (e.g., CACREP-accredited, public institution). The Qualtrics pre-screening questionnaire was then shared, along with a flyer advertising for the study, on various social media sites for potential participants, including professional counseling groups (such as the Association for Spirituality Ethics Religion and Values in Counseling's discussion board/email digest) as well as groups designed for individuals who previously identified as evangelicals (The Liturgists Facebook group). After potential participants took the survey, the researcher contacted them to either inform them that they qualified for the study, in which case they were asked to review and sign the consent form, or indicate they did not qualify for the study, in which case they were asked if they wanted to receive a referral for individual counseling to discuss their experiences. For potential participants who qualified and

signed the consent form, interviews were then scheduled. As all of the participants lived in different areas of the country, the researcher conducted interviews either through videoconferencing via Zoom or through an audio phone call.

Interview Protocol

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews per Smith's (2004) recommendation. (The interview schedule can be found later in this chapter as well as in Appendix B.) The researcher utilized Smith (2004)'s guidelines and the principles of Social Identity Theory to organize and structure the interview question. More information about the questions themselves, and the rationale behind them, can be found below. The semi-structured interview format allowed the researcher to utilize the interview schedule as a guide. Although care was given to ensure that all topics were discussed, the flexibility of semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to spend time on the nuances of each participant's story and on the topics that were most important to the participant. Participants were informed of their role in the interview: they had the power to stop at any time and engage in discussion beyond the questions asked if they desire. Interviews lasted roughly 60-90 minutes. Following the initial interviews, transcription of those interviews, and preliminary coding of themes (described below), the researcher then scheduled a follow up interview with the participants, which lasted between 20-50 minutes. In this follow up interview, the researcher asked the participants any clarifying questions and asked the participants if they had any follow up questions or lingering thoughts regarding the initial interview. The researcher then transcribed and coded the

second interview. The data analysis process, which ran simultaneous during the interview process, is described below.

Data Analysis

Bracketing

IPA researchers must acknowledge the "inevitability of biases" (Eatough & Smith, 2017, p. 4) when conducting research. Eatough and Smith (2017) did not insist upon removing the biases, as they tend to inform the researcher's desire to acquire further understanding and shape research questions. Instead, they asked the researcher to take a curiously questioning stance about the accuracy and origins of these biases, recognizing this is "always an unfinished activity" (Eatough & Smith, 2017, p. 4). With this in mind, the researcher of this study, as well as the second coder, composed a bracketing narrative with the endeavor of approaching her biases, assumptions, and experiences with curiosity and the intent not to transfer this bias into the interviews and analysis. The researcher's bracketing statement is listed below.

I am a White, southern, cisgender female who is in a period of spiritual struggle in her identity as a Christian. I grew up in an evangelical community, and part of my interest in this subject derives from my own experiences of feeling shaken in my faith and religious identity through my counselor training and education programs. Although my experiences with religion and Christianity have been mostly positive, I have found myself becoming increasingly guarded towards Christian belief systems that uphold strict hierarchies, place emphasis on a "born again" religious experiences, and are not affirming of LGBTQ+ populations and women's role in leadership.

I recognize my emotional reactivity to Christians who have hurt women and members of LGBTQ+ populations, and I will need to be aware of this before and during interviews so that I do not try to convince a participant of my beliefs inadvertently. Because my religious identity and faith underwent significant changes through my master's and doctoral programs, I will also need to guard against bias that the participants will have also shifted away from an evangelical identity. Additionally, I recognize that it might be difficult for me to stay in the researcher role and instead shift into counselor role during interviews. I will guard against this by providing referrals for participants who are interested in further counseling on this topic, and by monitoring myself for emotional reactivity. I will be keeping field notes after each interview to record my personal reactions, and will include these with the content of the interviews and my biases to the auditor.

Data Analyzation and Auditing

With biases acknowledged and the process of bracketing begun, the researcher then began to interview participants and analyzing data. As mentioned previously, the researcher simultaneously interviewed participants and analyzed completed interviews; once the researcher had a full transcript of the interview, analyzing data began. Smith and Osborn (2007) recommended reading through the interview several times before making notes to thoroughly immerse oneself in the document and the perspective of the participant. After reading the transcript, the researcher and second coder separately made notes on the document which included summarization, paraphrasing, and associations and/or connections to other material. These notes emphasized the language of the

participant, and noted any similarities, differences, metaphors, and contradictions within the interview, per Smith and Osborn's (2007) recommendation. After making notes on the entire transcript, the researcher and second coder met in person or via telephone to document emerging themes. The researcher and second coder met five separate times over the course of six weeks to discuss each interview, including the follow up interviews. During these meetings, the researcher took notes regarding the second coder and researcher's common observations and preliminary themes. To create a list of emerging themes, the researcher and second coder crafted "concise phrases" that "capture[d] the essential quality" of the participants' experience and language at a "slightly higher level of abstraction" (Smith & Osborn, 2007, p. 68). Once a list of initial themes had been created, the researcher and second coder then clustered the themes together based on connectedness, resulting in a master table of themes from all the interviews. After the interviews were coded by researcher and second coder, the researcher then further consolidated and edited themes, paring each theme with supporting quotes. The researcher then sent the master list of themes with supporting quotes to the second coder to check for accuracy. After the second coder gave approval, the master list of themes, the bracketing statements from both coders, and copies of de-identified transcripts of the interviews were sent to the auditor, Dr. Craig Cashwell. Dr. Cashwell has extensive experience studying, teaching, and counseling clients around issues related to spirituality and religion. Dr. Cashwell then reviewed the themes and gave the researcher feedback on the master list of themes.

Member Checking

To ensure that participants' voices were accurately represented, the researcher engaged in member checking. The researcher gave participants the list of themes that were found in their interviews, along with supporting quotes, and asked them to provide feedback on the accuracy of how their experiences were represented by the themes as well as whether their identity was sufficiently masked. None of the participants requested changes to their quotes.

Interview Schedule for Initial Interviews

Table 1. Interview Schedule

	Phase	Initial Question	Prompts	Rationale
1	**Pre-Program**	How did you learn about this study?	What led you to participate in this study? Do you have any questions before we proceed?	These questions help the researcher identity the participants' motivation for participating in the study, as well as build rapport and trust.
2		Please tell me a little about your personal history with religion.		Per Smith (2004)'s recommendation, the researcher utilized a broad open prompt to introduce the topic.
3		If you had to come up with the "criteria" for belonging to this group, what would that criteria be?	Are there any certain beliefs or experiences that come to mind?	The researcher is seeking to explore the participants understanding of evangelicalism as a social identity – that is, who is in the in-group and how do you know if they are in the in-group.

Table 1. Cont.

	Phase	Initial Question	Prompts	Rationale
4		Prior to your counselor education program, what did it mean to you to belong to this group?	Tell me about your emotions towards your faith before your program.	Here, the researcher is looking to explore the participants' meaning making of regarding of belonging to this group, as well as establishing a baseline to compare emotions towards faith during and after the program.
5		Did your faith impact your decision to become a counselor?		This question was designed to help researcher understand if faith was a "resource" in becoming a counselor. That is, did the evangelical identity drive the counselor identity?
6	**During Program**	Tell me about how your counselor training program impacted your faith.		Per Smith (2004)'s recommendation, the researcher utilized a broad open prompt to introduce this section of questions – which are becoming more and more specific towards the research question.
7		Was there any content that you found particularly relevant or significant to your faith or religious beliefs?	Internship or classes?	This question was designed to understand the inputs (per SIT's cycle) that the participants felt were significant to their experiences in their counselor training/education programs.

Table 1. Cont.

Phase	Initial Question	Prompts	Rationale
8	Were there any interactions with classmates, professors, supervisors, or clients that profoundly impacted your faith?		This question was designed to understand the inputs (per SIT's cycle) that the participants felt were significant to their experiences in their counselor training/education programs.
9	How would you describe your emotions towards your faith during your counselor training program?		This question allowed the researcher to better understand the outputs that were produced in the SIT cycle.
10	Have your faith or religious beliefs changed since beginning your training program?		This question was designed to help the researcher gauge if any adjustments were made to the identity standard.
11	Were any of your religious beliefs reinforced in your training program?		This question was designed to gauge what meanings stayed the same and/or strengthened within the identity standard.
12	How would you describe your support systems during your program?	Who was supportive for you? How were they supportive?	This was a broad, open question directed towards understanding participants' coping – particularly with any identity related distress – during the program.

Table 1. Cont.

	Phase	Initial Question	Prompts	Rationale
13		Did you feel supported by your program as you were experiencing challenges and/or affirmations to your faith?	If yes, what did this support look like? If not, how would you have liked to be supported by your program during this time?	This question was designed to better understand how counselor educators might support white evangelical students (or continue appropriately challenging them).
14	**Post-program**	How do those impacts from counselor program to your faith affect you today?	What effects, if any, show up in your relationship with God? What effects, if any, show up in important relationships? What effects, if any, show up in your faith community?	This question was designed to understand the longevity of the identity distress effects that occurred during the program – what meanings were integrated into the identity standard? What had been discarded now that they had left the stressful environment?
15		What are your emotions towards your religious/spiritual life now?		How have any lasting impacts affected their emotions towards their religious/spiritual life?
16.		What would you say to counselors-in-training who are currently experiencing profound changes in their faith due to their counselor training program?	Is there anything you wish you could go back and tell yourself?	This question is aimed at understanding how counselor educators might prepare incoming white evangelical students for what they might experience during their training program

Table 1. Cont.

Phase	Initial Question	Prompts	Rationale
16.			– and/or consider what they (the counselor educator) might need to do to create an equally challenging and supportive environment.
17.	What else would you like to share about your experience?		This final question allowed participants to share anything significant that was not discussed thus far.

Pilot Study

In the following section, the author will explore the purpose of the pilot as well as the specific research questions it addressed, the selected participants of the pilot study, and the procedures of the study.

Purpose

The purpose of the pilot study was to test the interview procedures of the proposed study as well as ensure the clarity of questions and interview instructions. Specifically, the purpose was to a) obtain an average interview length for the participant, b) ask for participant feedback on the clarity of the interview questions to ensure quality and brevity, c) ask participants to review the clarity and quality of social media invitations and interview instructions, and d.) receive and implement feedback to the full study. The researcher obtained approval through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro to proceed with the pilot study.

Following this, the researcher invited two acquaintances from her master's program who previously expressed interest in this topic to interview and solicit feedback to improve the full study.

Research Questions

The pilot study addressed the following research questions:

Research Question 1: Are the written communication provided to advertise for the study clear and understandable to participants?

Research Question 2: Are the written and verbal communication about the instructions of interview procedures clear and understandable to participants?

Research Question 3: Are the questions used in the semi-structured interview protocol clear and understandable to the participants?

Research Question 3b: Are there any additional questions that should be added?

Research Question 4: What is the average length of time for each interview?

Participants

Participants were intentionally selected to be invited for the pilot study, as the researcher was familiar with their identities as white evangelicals and knew that they qualified for the study (e.g., that they agreed with the screening statements and graduated from CACREP-accredited public institutions). Interviews with the participants were scheduled after accepting an invitation to help with the pilot study. The first interview took place via video conferencing through the platform Zoom, as the participant was located in a different state than the researcher. This participant identified herself as someone whose white evangelical identity underwent significant changes due to her

counselor training program, a process known as “deconstruction” (Fuchs & Ward, 1994). Pilot Participant 1 wished to participate in the study because her experiences were “life-changing,” and she wanted to support the researcher’s efforts to understand white evangelical counselors-in-training experiences in counselor training programs. The second participant’s interview was conducted in a face-to-face interview. This participant wished to participate in the pilot study as her evangelical identity did not change as a result of her counselor training program, but was affirmed. This participant hoped to help the researcher explore the ways in which faith can be challenged through counselor training programs, and that beliefs do not necessarily have to change as a result of their experiences. The researcher was intentional in seeking interviews with two different experiences of counselor training programs (affirmed beliefs and identity vs. deconstructed beliefs and identity) to ensure the interview schedule was not biased in its language based on researchers’ personal experiences in her masters and doctoral programs.

Procedures

Prior to the interview, the researcher asked participants to confirm the screening statements and subsequently scheduled the interviews. The videoconferencing and face-to-face formats allowed researcher to also explore the challenges of each format. At the start of the interview, participants were read the instructions for the interview, asked for permission to record the interview, and asked if they had any questions. Following this, the researcher proceeded through the interview schedule. At conclusion of interview, participants were asked to give feedback on interview schedule, pre-screening

questionnaire (found in Appendix C), and social media recruitment materials (Appendix H).

Feedback Informing the Full Study

The participants made several suggestions for improving the study. In regards to the interview schedule, three suggestions were made to increase the clarity of the questions. First, a participant suggested removing the question, “What did it look like to be a member of this group?” and instead use the first probe, “If you had to come up with the “criteria” for belonging to this group, what would that criteria be?” The participant stated that the original question was confusing. Second, a participant asked that a probe be included in the question, “Was there any content [in your training program] that you found particularly relevant or significant to your faith or religious beliefs?” to give examples of the kinds of content that could be relevant; e.g., internship, a particular class, etc. Next, a participant stated that in the question, “Did you share with anyone how your faith was being impacted by your program?” she wished it were phrased as an open question instead, as there were certain groups she shared with and others with whom she intentionally chose not to share. Overall, though, both participants reported that the questions were easily understood and that they flowed well.

In regards to the recruitment materials, no suggestions were offered to improve clarity instead reporting that the documents were easily understood and interesting. Similarly, the participants stated that the instructions for the interview were clear. A participant made a suggestion to the pre-screening questionnaire. She stated that she would have liked the inclusion of some kind of phrase in the second screening statement

that clarified that the study was open to individuals whose evangelical identity did not change because of their training program. The participant stated that while the phrase "profoundly affected" was neutral, she wished there was some indication that the "effect" did not necessarily mean a deterioration of beliefs.

Adjustments to the Full Study

The feedback of the participants was incorporated in some minor changes to the pre-screening questionnaire, semi-structured interview questions, and procedures. These included the following:

- Changed the second pre-screening statement from, "My counselor training program profoundly affected my relationship with God, my faith community, and/or my identity as a Christian," to "My counselor training program profoundly affected, either positively or negative, my relationship with God, my faith community, and/or my identity as a Christian." This incorporates feedback on the range of experiences the researcher is looking for in her participants.
- Removed the question, "What did it look like to be a member of this religious group?" and instead promoted the probe, "If you had to come up with the "criteria" for belonging to this group, what would that criteria be?"
- Added a probe to the question, "Was there any content that you found particularly relevant or significant to your faith or religious beliefs?" to include the types of content that could be relevant, such as internship and classes.

- Changed probes to the question, “Did you share with anyone how your faith was being impacted by your program?” from two closed questions to two open question, “What was it like sharing this with someone? How was this conversation received?”
- Include in follow-up email, after chosen to participate, that those participating via videoconference that they will need to download software to use for the videoconference.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

In Chapter I, the author introduced the topic of religious identities in counselors and the difficulties white evangelical counselors might face in counselor education programs. Chapter II explored in more detail the nuances of social identities, particularly that of white evangelicalism, and the ways in which counselor education may not verify the white evangelical identity. In Chapter III, the author proposed a study, indicating the design, research questions, participants, procedures, and method of analysis. The findings of this study are presented in this chapter.

Research Question

This study was guided by the following research question:

In what ways do counselor training programs affect white evangelical counselor's social identity as white evangelicals?

Participants

To recruit participants, the researcher created a Qualtrics pre-screening questionnaire that required potential participants to share their contact information, affirm or deny the screening statements, and gather demographic data. The Qualtrics questionnaire was then shared, along with a flyer advertising for the study, on various social media sites for potential participants, including professional counseling groups

(i.e., the Association for Spirituality, Ethics, Religion and Values in Counseling's discussion board/email digest and a Facebook group for local mental health professionals), as well as groups designed for deconstructing evangelicals (The Liturgists Facebook groups). The researcher also engaged in snowball sampling by asking anyone who read the flyer to invite others who might be interested in participating.

A total of 54 people expressed interest in participating and began the Qualtrics questionnaire, with a total of 40 completing the questionnaire. Of this 40, six individuals met the inclusion criteria. Four of these six completed the semi-structured interview. The people who did not move on to the interview did not respond to follow up emails and phone calls, and so it is unknown why they chose not to participate.

All four participants met the inclusion criteria of being white women who graduated from CACREP-accredited, public institutions who affirmed the two screening statements. All were willing to participate in a recorded interview. The researcher did not ask the participants to give their ages, but instead allowed participants to choose the appropriate age bracket. Two of the four participants were between 20-39 years old, one participant between 40-59 years old, and one 60+ years old. In reporting education level, three reported having a Master's degree, while one reported having a PhD. When reporting current religious affiliation, two reported Evangelical Christian, one reported Catholic, and one reported Mainline Protestant.

Procedures

In preparation for conducting this study, the researcher conducted a literature review on the topic of religious identities of counselors and potential conflicts Christian

counselors might experience in their counselor training program. The researcher then identified a gap in understanding the social identities of counselor and white evangelical; identified a theoretical framework, Social Identity Theory (SIT; Burke & Stets, 2009), and methodological procedure, Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; Smith, 2004), to use; and created 17 interview questions informed by SIT and IPA for the interview schedule. After gaining IRB approval, the researcher proceeded with recruitment for the study and conducted four semi-structured interviews. Three interviews were conducted via Zoom, and one interview was conducted over the telephone. After the initial interviews, the researcher conducted follow up interviews roughly 4-5 weeks following the initial interview; three of these follow up interviews were conducted via Zoom and one conducted via telephone.

Analysis

Each interview was transcribed, and then the researcher and second coder followed standard IPA protocol of several read-throughs of each interview and noted any observations that seemed unique and/or important. Following their individual read-throughs, the second coder and researcher met in person to discuss the transcripts; the researcher and second coder met five separate times over the course of six weeks to discuss each interview. During these meetings, the researcher took notes regarding the second coder and researcher's common observations and preliminary themes. Following these meetings, the primary investigator analyzed the notes and created a formal write-up of the list of preliminary themes. Once the researcher finished the formal write up, the researcher then clustered the themes together based on connectedness and matched each

theme with supporting quotes, resulting in a master table of themes from all the interviews. After the master list was created, the second coder reviewed the master list to ensure accuracy. Following this, the bracketing statements, the de-identified transcripts, and the list of themes was reviewed by an auditor. Feedback from the auditor included a note that there was an abundance of themes with only one participant, and to consider collapsing as many of the themes as possible. The auditor noted, though, that each of these themes seemed idiosyncratic and this might not be possible.

Following this, the researcher then engaged in member checking, by individually emailing each participant a list of themes and corresponding quotes from their interview and asking for feedback on whether or not the themes appeared accurate, thus ensuring that the participants' voices were prioritized in the study. Participants were also asked to evaluate if the quotes felt too identifiable. They were asked to respond within two days if they desired to provide feedback. Three of participants responded; all three shared that they felt the themes were consistent with their experiences and did not request changes.

Results

The themes described below are divided into Pre-Program, During Program, and After Program sections. A number of "themes" identified by the researcher and second coder only have quotes from one participant; however, they were retained in the final results. While only one person endorsed some of the specific themes, they seemed consistent with the SIT of the identity cycle and if the sample size was larger it is likely that researcher would have heard similar experiences. Thus, they were kept in the final

results for reference for future studies. However, the researcher will place much greater emphasis in reporting on the themes with two or more participants' support.

The types of experiences were described below:

- Three participants discussed their experiences in a Master's program, particularly focusing on experiences in the classroom and in internship with clients.
- One discussed primarily her experience in her PhD program, particularly around her research topic and participants' stories.
- Two of the master's level participants felt largely ignored or invalidated by their program in regards to their religious identity.
- One master's student felt supported by her program in her religious identity.
- All four cited that their personal faith/beliefs were strengthened through their experiences in their counselor education programs.

The themes were most easily sorted into three phases: Pre-Program Themes, During-Program Themes, and Post-Program Themes. In the Pre-Program Phase, five common themes were found. In the During-Program Phase, seven common themes were found. In the Post-Program Phase, two common themes were found. In total, 14 common themes were found; the themes for each section can be found in Table 2-4.

Table 2. Themes for Pre-Program Phase

Common Themes	Sub Themes from individual interviews	Seen in Participants
Types of Community	Family	1,2,3,4
	Campus ministry	1, 3
	Youth group	1,2,3
	Church Body	1, 2, 3
Beliefs	Biblicalism	1,2,3
	Conversionism	1,2
	Community Emphasis & Activism	1, 2, 3
	Cruicentrism	2,3,4
	Sinful Nature of Humanity	3, 4
Identity Standard	Sense of belonging	1,2,3,4
	Responsibility for self	1,4
	Self-Acceptance	1,2
Decision to become a counselor	In-group Influence	1,2,
	Interest in psychology	1, 2, 4
	Desire to help Others	1, 2, 3, 4
	Sense of Calling/ Ministry	2, 3
Program Selection	Convenience	1,2,3
	Generalized Training	1, 4
	Faculty interactions	1, 3

Table 3. Themes for During-Program Phase

Common Themes	Sub Themes from individual interviews	Examples	Seen in Participants
Challenging Program Content	Classes		1,2
	Research		3
Perceived program rejection of White Evangelical identity: Identified as "Micro-aggressions" & feelings of being marginalized by participants	Feeling unimportant		1, 2
	Feeling interrogated and/or shamed in the classroom		1, 2
	Feeling misunderstood		1, 2
	Fear of professional rejection		1
	Pervasive sense of incompatibility with counseling		1,2
Role of Faculty	General feelings of mistrust		1,2
	Faculty classroom management		1,2,4
	General feelings of trust		3,4
Identity Distress	Incongruence between counselor identity and White Evangelical Christian identity		1,2,3
	Potential subthemes	*Jesus vs Christianity*	*3*
		Motivation for belief	*2*
Coping with identity distress	Support Seeking	In program	1,2, 3
		Out of program	1,2,3

Table 3. Cont.

Common Themes	Sub Themes from individual interviews	Examples	Seen in Participants
	Meaning making	Reframing as an opportunity for growth (self-focused)	1, 2, 3, 4
		Reframing as an opportunity for growth (others-focused)	2, 4
		Emotions towards faith/God	1, 2, 3,4
	Potential Subtheme:	*System-level reframing*	*3*
	Self-doubt	Merging identities: Can I be both a counselor and a Christian?	1, 2
	Compartmentalization	With clients	1,2,3
		Emotions	3
	Classroom Participation		1,2
	Maintaining role in faith community		2,3,4
Ripple effects into faith community	*Potential Subthemes:*	*Emotions towards organized religion/ Church/ Christianity*	*3*
		Difficulty finding a faith community;	*3*
Experiences of congruence of counselor identity and White Evangelical Identity	Acceptance by field		1, 3, 4
	Acceptance by program		1,2
	Examples of successful compartmentalization/ merging of identities		2,3
	Potential subtheme	*Personal understanding of congruence between identities*	*4*

Table 4. List of Themes for Post-Program Phase

Common Themes	Sub Themes from Individual interviews	Examples	Seen in Participants
Effects on Personal Faith	Importance of Spiritual Practices		2, 4
	Emotions towards faith		1,2,4
	Confidence in White Evangelical identity		1,2
	Beliefs strengthened		1,2,3,4
	Shifted emphasis/priorities in faith		1,3
Effects to Career	Christian Counseling Opportunities		1,2
	Potential subtheme:	*Integration of counselor and white evangelical identity*	*1*

Pre-Program Common Themes

In the following section, the common themes that were found in the Pre-Program phase are listed. The common themes include: *types of community, beliefs, identity standard, decision to become a counselor,* and *program selection.* These themes emerged as participants described their personal history with religion and why they became counselors.

Influential Community

When sharing about their personal history with religion, all four participants shared at least one entity that had shaped their evangelical identity standard—that is, what it means to them to be an evangelical Christian. These communities largely

revolved around family and their church membership. Common phrases when describing their introduction to Christianity was being "born into," "brought up with," or "raised in" Christian families (Participants 1, 3, and 4, respectively).

Though family was often mentioned first, it appeared that, for most of the participants, their communities expanded as they aged to include groups outside the home that continued to develop their white evangelical identity standard, including their church body, youth group, and campus ministries. For example, Participant 3 shared, "[My church] was truly a village that raised me . . . it was a really positive, loving, and affirming of me." Participant 2 described being "really involved" in youth group as a teenager, and Participant 3 described her continued growth in faith during college through a "leadership position" in her campus ministry.

Beliefs

When asked to describe the "in-group" of evangelicals, all four participants responded with some requirements related to beliefs, and these largely echoed the NAE's (2018a) definition of evangelical belief. Three participants described the principle of biblicalism, which is best encapsulated by Participant 2's description: "I believe in biblical inerrancy and that for people who want to live as Christians . . . the way to interact with . . . the world and other people, the Bible is the tool we've been given to do that." Participants 1 and 2 also described conversionism as a standard of belief, described by Participant 1 as "hav[ing] faith in the Savior Jesus Christ . . . and living out what Jesus teaches." Three participants also described their in-group as having a community emphasis, including the principle of activism. Participant 2 described this principle

succinctly in the following statement: “I believe in sharing the Gospel with other people . . . my church does a lot of missions work trying to bring the Gospel to people.” The final NAE principle of Cruicentrism was espoused by Participants 2, 3, and 4. Participant 4 utilized a well-known Bible verse to explain this component of belief to the researcher: “God loved us so much that he sent his only son to die on the cross to atone for our sins . . . if we believe that and accept that . . . we would be saved from being eternally separated from God.” Two of the participants added a final component of belief that, while present in the above principles, was more explicitly conveyed as acknowledging the sinful nature of humanity. Speaking to this belief, Participant 4 stated, “We, as human beings are born with a sin nature to be selfish . . .”

Identity Standard

A third common theme in the pre-program phase included that of the identity standard. These are the characteristics and meaning that define what it means for these participants to be a member of the white evangelical group and the effects that these meanings have on the individual.

Sense of belonging. For example, the first sub-theme within the identity standard was that of a sense of belonging; the white evangelical identity provided participants with a sense of being accepted and wanted. Consider the following quotes that describe the meaning and emotional support the participants reported they receive from this identity. Participant 1 stated,

> It’s been the one thing that has stayed constant throughout my life. There’s so many other things that have been impactful for me but haven’t been as reliable.

> Faith is the one thing that I know I can return to when everything else goes awry or I don't know where to go. It's where I've always found my sense of comfort.

Similarly, Participant 2 shared, "[Faith] was really important for me because [I got] . . . positive acceptance [and] other believers supporting and encouraging me." Participant 3 identified "[Church was] really positive, loving, and affirming . . . a place of comfort and guidance and reassurance."

Responsibility for self. Another sub-theme within that of the identity standard included a sense of responsibility for self. For Participant 1, this meant that her beliefs "change how I live out all the different dynamics of my life . . . what I choose to pursue, how I choose to speak, how I choose to dress . . . everything stems from that." For Participant 4, this looked more like taking responsibility for wrongs that have occurred. For example, Participant 4 stated, "I would have to say that there is a part of being a Christian that is important—it's not guilt as much as it a repentance, a genuine sorry-ness when you have messed up."

Self-acceptance. The final subtheme found in the identity standard common theme was in one's acceptance of self. Participant 1 shared, "[My faith] meant knowing that I am okay the way that I am." Participant 2 expanded on this, sharing,

> I'm generally an anxious type person. I think throughout my life, being a part of a Body of Believers has given me sort of . . . a foundational piece that has helped me get through some of the more difficult times and self-doubt. It's given me a way to ground myself.

Decision to Become a Counselor

The fourth common theme in the pre-program phase included motivations as to why the participants wanted to become a counselor. These themes encapsulate many stories regarding how participants discovered their love for listening and helping others.

In-group influence. Participants 1 and 2 both mentioned an in-group influence. For Participant 1, this looked like a desire to help in-group members. She stated, "Even before grad school, I knew that professionally I wanted my focus to be faith in mental health, and eventually work with the Christian Catholic population." Meanwhile, for Participant 2, her experiences within the in-group helped informed this decision. She shared,

> Before I fully decided to apply to grad school, I was a Bible study leader at my church . . . I think through that it gave me all of these opportunities to really pour into other people . . . I realized how much it did for me to be able to pour into people in that way.

Interest in psychology. Another common subtheme that led three of the four participants towards a career in counseling was an interest in psychology and learning about how the human mind functions. Two of the three mentioned majoring in psychology while one stated that a psychology course peaked her in interest in the field.

Sense of calling or ministry. Two of the four participants also described a subtheme of a sense of calling to the field or the field as a method of ministry. Speaking to this sense of calling, Participant 2 explained, "I believe that we were created to be in community with one another and so I think that there is a very deep and transpersonal need to be vulnerable with others . . . I think it's part of my calling." Participant 3 shared,

"I . . . consider my intuition to be the Holy Spirit speaking . . . [going into the counseling field] was just like, 'Oh this is what I'm supposed to do.'" Later, Participant 3 shared, "The healing aspect [of counseling] and feeling that, even though it's not called ministry, it's always felt like ministry to me."

Desire to help others. All four participants stated that a desire to help others was another motivator towards becoming a counselor, thus indicating our final subtheme. As Participant 2 most succinctly phrased it, "I just like helping people. I feel blessed to be let into somebody's life . . . like it's a sacred honor." Participant 1 shared, "I wanted to be able to . . . go into the stories of other people to enter into where they're at and where they are hurting to be able to actually help them." Participants 3 and 4 shared experiences in previous academic and professional settings that led them to realize their desire to help others. Participant 3 said, "The times [in my job] that I loved the most was when people would stop by and share problems." For Participant 4, it was a negative experience in advising; "I really sort of fell through the cracks of a large institution and I thought, 'Man, I would like to be an advisor and do it the way I would have responded best to."

Program Selection

The final common theme in the pre-program phase included patterns regarding how the participants selected their counselor training program. The participants seemed to choose their programs largely on factors related to convenience, though for some the specifics of the program and faculty were important.

Convenience. The most common subtheme for this section was convenience. Participants 1, 2, and 3 mentioned price, location, and close distance from family as being primary motivators for the selection of their program.

Generalized training. Participants 1 and 4 mentioned specifically seeking out a program that was not associated with a particular denomination or faith practice. As Participant 1 put it,

> I wanted the more generalized training [that a secular program provides]. I knew that I could choose the direction or focus of where I wanted to go, rather than maybe risking not getting certain pieces of the field or certain courses . . . [I wanted to be] exposed to such different viewpoints . . . in my program, there was people of every sort of life, belief, way of living, perspective, and although that was really hard, I learned so much from it. And I don't think I would have had that particular growth opportunity in a Christian . . . program.

Faculty interactions. Finally, faculty interactions seemed to play a role in two participants decision regarding counselor training programs. Participant 4 stated, "I . . . interviewed at [a university] for their program and I did mention [my interest in] the spirituality piece. And there were looks of horror . . . I remember just kind of being like 'Oh, okay. This isn't the place for me for this.'"

During-Program Common Themes

The majority of common themes were found in the During-Program phase, which are listed. The common themes included *challenging program content, perceived program rejection of white evangelical identity, role of faculty, identity distress, coping with identity distress, ripple effects into faith community,* and *experiences of congruence between counselor and white evangelical identities.* These themes emerged as

participants described their experiences in their counselor training programs and how their experience affected their faith and identity as white evangelicals.

Challenging Program Content

Three of the four participants shared that some aspect of their program provided some kind of challenge to their faith. Two participants identified specific class content, particularly in their Counseling Diverse Populations and human sexuality courses, as being challenging.

Participant 1 shared,

> I think my Counseling Diverse Populations course is one that sticks out as particularly challenging, as well as our Sexual Issues and Counseling course . . . those stick out to me, where we kind of really got into the nitty-gritty of some of the differing beliefs of people who are Christian and live by Christian faith, and people who don't. There were some hard conversations in some of those classes that made me question things—not so much in terms of questioning my faith, but sort of having to change how I understand what my faith meant, or how I lived out certain pieces of my faith.

Participant 2 explained,

> I think the most difficult [class was] Counseling Culturally Diverse populations class—not because there's anything particularly challenging in my mind about working with people of different faiths, but that was the class where I couldn't ask the questions that I wanted to ask. I couldn't push some of these concepts that were being sort of given to us as, "Well, this is how it is." That was a class that was a struggle for me because I felt like I was very limited in how much I could interact with the material . . . I think I would get frustrated that I didn't feel like we could flesh out certain ideas and arguments because I felt like it was frowned upon to question certain things within my program.

For the participant who had completed a doctoral program, it was her research about spiritual harm that was particularly challenging. She shared,

> By doing my research and hearing these horrific stories . . . I found myself really annoyed and sometimes to the point of being angry at what I see as really trite religion . . . people using their faith and their religion for their own power and their own personal gain.

Perceived Program Rejection of White Evangelical Identity

Participants 1 and 2 both shared in their interviews that they felt that their program rejected their religious identity. They described their experience as being filled with "microaggressions"[3] towards their identity and marginalized by both classmates and faculty. There were several subthemes regarding the kinds of "microaggressions" they described.

Feeling unimportant. The first subtheme these participants described was a feeling that their Christian perspective was unimportant to faculty and classmates. Participant 2 stated, "[I felt like] my ideas and opinions weren't really welcome in this setting and it was best for me to just be quiet and bide my time until I can get out of here and then I can go back to being who I am." Speaking to a similar experience, Participant 1 stated,

> [In Counseling Diverse Populations Class, there] is this general idea that we have to be aware of and accepting of whatever culture people bring into a room and if we, as counselors, don't know about a certain culture, or don't understand a certain belief, to never assume we know it, and to do our research, ask appropriate questions to try to understand – kind of put ourselves to the side and enter into whatever culture is sitting in front of us or whatever collection of cultures. That is something that's so important. But I felt like Christianity was often excluded from that because people tend to think of it as a majority population that, for some

[3] Author's note: the term microaggressions is used to describe subtle instances of prejudice. As such, microaggressions occur when people with privileged identities oppress individuals with marginalized identities. Thus, this term does not accurately describe the participants experience since in the U.S., Christianity is the privileged religion. However, the author will continue to use this term throughout Chapters IV and V because this is the language that the participants used to describe their experience.

> reason, we wouldn't then need the same care as maybe someone coming in with a very minority [identity].

Feeling interrogated and/or shamed. Another similar perceived microaggression included feeling interrogated and/or shamed in the classroom. Participants listed both cohort members and faculty members as perpetrators of this microaggression. Participant 1 shared this experience,

> I interviewed a friend [for an assignment in the human sexuality course] who is an instructor for the Creighton Method, which is a method of natural family planning. It's rooted in science and also goes along with Catholic teachings. So it's what Catholic families are encouraged to use and a way to understand sexual health, sexual intimacy, relationships while doing it in accordance with God's plan. So I was already nervous to present that to my class just because it is something faith related and I wasn't promoting the use of contraception. So when I did that presentation, I got a lot of harsh questions and comments about it, kind of grilling me on the science of everything—which wasn't fair because I'm not the expert. [They were] trying to debunk it because it wasn't hormonal contraception . . . and not really listening to what I'm saying. And I think a lot of it came because it was faith related, it was something they hadn't heard of before, and . . . [for some people] it's sanctioned or sponsored by a religious organization, [and] they wanted nothing to do with it.

Participant 2 gave this example,

> There was a situation where a person who was not part of our cohort was in the [Counseling Diverse Populations] class. Because they didn't know me in all of these other settings [e.g., classes practicums, etc.], they took what I was saying . . . they took offense to it, and they essentially, I guess, they went to professor and the professor gave them permission to call me out in the middle of class. In front of everybody. And it was like—a really hard, like one of the hardest moments of graduate school just because I felt like so like exposed . . . It was so catastrophic . . . [I was thinking], "Oh my God. This is a nightmare . . . at least I'm wearing clothes because the only thing that could make this worse is like I'm naked in front of everyone."

Feeling misunderstood. Another microaggression, that seemed unique from the previous two, was a sense of being misunderstood despite their best efforts to communicate their thoughts and intentions. The participants described both feeling intentionally misunderstood (e.g., cohort members listening to argue rather than to understand) and unintentionally misunderstood. Concerning this, Participant 1 stated,

> The majority in the [class]room were not Christian. . . . A lot of times, the people who were Christian might not feel comfortable saying something, or when we do say something, it was often taken the wrong way or misconstrued. So then the next time it comes up, and we don't feel comfortable saying it, or when we do, it gets shut down quickly.

Participant 2 acknowledged this subtheme strongly; she stated,

> I think that I was really sensitive to a lot of negative comments . . . somebody would make a derogatory comment about Christians . . . it's like, "even though I don't feel that way or behave that way, I'm going to be lumped in with these people who are considered to be judgmental, intolerant, hateful bigots."

Pervasive sense of incompatibility with counseling. All of these microaggressions culminated in a perceived sense that Evangelical Christianity and the counseling field were incompatible. Participant 2 stated, "The first year I was kind of made to feel like all of these beliefs I had were going to be major roadblocks to me being a good counselor. I was very concerned about . . . I'm not going to be good enough." Participant 1 expounded on this sentiment in her interview,

> A classmate had made some comment, or there was this underlying message, that if we were Christian, we wouldn't be able to be unbiased in a room with someone maybe wanting to get an abortion, or someone coming in and wanting to transition [gender identities] . . . that we wouldn't be able to work with that client

> effectively. And then the reverse assumption would be true—that someone who's not Christian would much better handle that client encounter. And so, sort of, the thought that being Christian made us less able to do our job. We sort of had this hard roadblock where we have this outer boundary where we can't serve these clients very well. And according to all the different ethics, you can't refer someone for being transgender or you can't just turn people away. So the feeling in the room was that, everyone knew who was Christian in the room . . . those people wouldn't be able to do this thing here that all of this group of people is really championing and would be really good at.

Role of Faculty

Perhaps due to these perceived rejections of their evangelical identity the role of faculty was identified as a common theme in the during-program phase. Interestingly, faculty were seen and experienced by participants in contrasting regards: as supportive mentors to trust and as unsupportive gatekeepers to be wary of.

General feelings of mistrust. Participant 1 described that, even though she had identified faculty members that she found supportive, she still found herself censoring her concerns and experiences. For example, she stated, "Even in some of those conversations [with supportive faculty members], I felt like I had to be careful about what I was saying because they're my professors – they're evaluating me and they're going to check off if I can be a counselor or not."

Participant 2 shared a similar fear of being too open with her experiences and thoughts with faculty. She stated,

> I just kind of got the impression that if I was too vocal about some of the more exclusive parts of my faith, that they would then feel that I did wouldn't have the ability to sit with somebody who identified as an atheist . . . I was worried that they would think that I was trying to push my religion on other people. I felt like I needed to withhold those thoughts and beliefs in class . . . I didn't feel like I could talk to them about how I was struggling to sort of balance some of these concepts

> as a Christian because . . . not only did they not follow [my beliefs], they kind of look down on a lot of them because they feel like [my faith is] limiting.

Classroom management. Participants 1 and 2 commented on their perception of their faculty's classroom management skills, and how this contributed to their feelings of being marginalized. Participant 1 stated, "[I wish faculty] rather than kind of . . . letting us get dominated by the majority in the room . . . I would have felt like I was treated more equally if that hadn't occurred." Participant 2 shared,

> We had one girl in the class who identified her religion as Pagan . . . It sort of felt like [faculty] were very enthusiastic and accepting of her religious rituals and practices and beliefs . . . but maybe because Christianity is the dominant Western religion in America, [we didn't] need the encouragement.

General feelings of trust. Alternatively, Participants 3 and 4 felt generally trusting of their faculty. Participant 3 stated, "One of the reasons I wanted to be at [this university] was because it was a place where I felt like I really would be safe . . . [I thought they] would understand the importance of my faith in the middle of it." Similarly, Participant 4 shared, "I had some amazing professors that . . . when I did run into any kind of trouble or problem, I knew that it would be okay to go and talk to my professors and get some good advice."

Identity Distress

The next common theme in the participants' interviews for the "During Program" phase was identity distress; that is, a felt and troubling incongruence between the counselor identity and the white evangelical identity. Participants 1, 2, and 3 felt this in varying degrees throughout their program and related to different topics. Participant 1

discussed this feeling of distress as it occurred when interacting with her faith community,

> [People in my faith community] are like, "Why can't you tell them about Jesus? How can you talk with someone about these things that are not in line with the teachings of the church? What do you think you're doing' And that can make me feel like, 'Oh, am I being a bad Christian? Am I not living in accordance with these things? If this [client] said this, and I didn't tell them not to do it, and I went along with it, where does that put me in terms of my morals?

Participant 2 described an experience of identity stress in the classroom,

> [In the Sexuality class], we had a speaker come in and talk to us about polyamory and all of that . . . there were questions I had like, 'How does this affect your children?' That was the day when part of my beliefs . . . about what may be healthiest for raising children . . . became really relevant again. And what I was being told [by professors] is that I needed to be fully accepting it, and not just like accepting and tolerant of, but like embracing . . . and so the idea of being an ally for a community that maybe sometimes the behaviors aren't necessarily healthy for maybe the kids involved . . . and so that's kind of where that tension of holding contradictory ideas in my mind at one time and having to figure out how do I manage this?

Meanwhile, for Participant 3, this identity distress was displayed most clearly in her inner conflict regarding her beliefs around inviting others into the Christian community.

> There's been a lot of struggle between . . . Am I compromising my faith in some ways . . . or kind of . . . how much is that evangelism piece—and I mean that in the truest sense of the word, spreading [the Gospel]—what's my responsibility? Am I compromising too much by saying, "It's okay if you believe this?" Or how much am I compromising by just . . . knowing all the horrible things that religion has done, you know, [can I still be] encouraging people to be a part of it?

Potential subthemes. There were two subthemes that only had one participant support each. However, these subthemes seem to be consistent with the literature

regarding deconstructing an identity (e.g., replacing old meanings in the identity standard with new ones) and are deserving of more research. These themes are mentioned here.

Jesus vs Christianity. In this potential subtheme, the participant described a sense of embarrassment or distress at being identified with the institution of Christianity. For example, Participant 3 shared, "I've never been ashamed of Jesus Christ. I've often been ashamed of Christianity."

Motivation for belief. In this potential subtheme Participant 2 described a period of excavation in her faith. She seemed to experience an extended period of having to discover what her motivation for being a Christian was, as her previous motivations seemed to be insufficient in the face of the challenges in her program. She shared,

> The program really forced me to look at my heart more in terms of my relationship with God. Like, what is this doing for me? Why is this important to me? Why is it so important for me to stay faithful and stay true to these tenants while also being challenged in these other ways . . . I really had to dig deep and explore what my faith [is] doing for me and why is it so important to me? And what does the Bible say about this? Because I'm being told this, and then how do I balance these two things?

Coping with Identity Distress

Support seeking. The participants identified many different coping strategies; one of the most prominent being support seeking. In the support seeking subtheme, there were three trends: in-program, in-group (e.g., other Christians) support seeking; in-program, out-group support seeking (e.g., non-Christians); and out-of-program, in-group support seeking. The in-program, in-group support seeking often involved seeking out

other classmates and/or cohort members who shared similar religious identities.

Participant 1 stated,

> I lived with someone who was in my cohort who's also Christian. We didn't know each other before the program, but we moved in and then . . . she's become one of my best friends and we were able to process a lot of things together and support one another in our journey.

Similarly, Participant 2 shared,

> I also found that there were people in the program who had really strong faith themselves and so being able to talk to them about these issues was really important to me because I was able to see how they were navigating these situations.

In-program, out-group support seeking often involved seeking guidance and/or understanding from cohort members and peers within the program. Participant 1 described this support as follows,

> Later on, having [one-on-one] conversations with some of the other [non-Christian] classmates . . . That's where I found much more of the understanding afterwards, where we could start to form those two-way streets and [I could] show them I care—I genuinely care about you the way that I care about everybody else. And allowing them to care about me . . . by the end of my program, I think those one-on-one conversation helped me change the feeling in the classroom, where I did feel a little more able to talk about some of the things in regards to my faith.

Participant 2 echoed this sentiment:

> I became close friends with [a cohort member] who identifies as Pagan. I think that was a really cool part of the experience for me, too, because we were able to find so many things in common and . . . I think having a strong friendship with her and [another cohort member], did a lot for me in terms of the idea of being

> able to relate to different people with radically different beliefs systems and be curious and inquisitive.

Out-of-program, in-group support seeking seemed to stem from supportive friends, family, and mentors outside of the counselor training environment who shared their religious identity. These individuals and groups seemed to be particularly needed by participants when facing identity distress stemming from microaggressions in the program. Participant 1 stated,

> I had my family . . . especially my mom . . . It was really cool to lean into her for [support] as someone who wasn't sitting in my classes with me all day. She wasn't someone I lived with, wasn't someone I worked with—someone who really knew me and could connect but was also on the outside.

Participant 2 identified many individuals who were outside of her program but her personal counselor seemed to make the most meaningful impact,

> My counselor disclosed to me that she was a Christian and when she did that it was such a relief for me because I was like, "Okay. You get my worldview. You're not going to think I'm a bigot or a bad person or something if I talk to you about my struggle with this or that." It was a real relief for me . . . that I felt like I can be vulnerable with you about these things even though I can't really talk about it in my program.

Meaning making. Another common coping strategy among participants was reframing the meaning of the challenging experience as an opportunity for growth. All participants mentioned their self-growth through their training program. Participant 1 shared, "I tried to find a way to gain something from [this trial of faith], to gain something from it, and to use if for something productive." Participant 2 found these

challenges to be a God-given learning opportunity: “I personally believe that God put all of these people in my life around me when I needed it, but I couldn’t see different ways to live out the life that I was trying to learn for myself.” Participant 3 shared that her meaning reframe included her personal agency towards change: “I think that there’s been a lot of false narratives [about Christianity] out there and that I have a responsibility to contribute what I believe to be a more truthful narrative.” Participant 4 noted her personal growth regarding how to respectfully embrace her own faith identity: “[My program] help[ed] me to embrace my Christianity but at the same time also be respectful and mindful of other faiths.”

Another form of meaning making was other-focused. In this form of meaning making, the participants reframed the challenges they faced as opportunities to grow in their ability to relate to and understand people who do not share their religious identity. Participant 2 shared,

> I think I became more attached and stronger in my faith . . . while also having a deeper respect for people who have divergent beliefs . . . I feel like I’m much more able to relate to people on a multicultural level and I’m much more informed about issues. Maybe I don’t necessarily agree with this issue, but I understand why someone else does agree with it and I’m able to really bracket that one part of me so that I can really relate to somebody on another level.

Participant 4 shared this story regarding her growth in interfaith dialogue:

> The program taught me how to connect with people from different kinds of spiritual beliefs in a way that I had not expected, which was very very helpful because I knew a lot about Judeo Christian beliefs . . . but I didn’t know a lot about Buddhism and Hinduism. And it was okay to ask questions . . . It was wonderful to read . . . and then to talk to people of different faiths as well as to hear the stories of their faith meant to them . . . [I prayed] with a student that was

> Muslim [during my internship]. She and I were both praying together in my office and it was just awesome . . . we were concerned about whether she was going to pass . . . it wasn't something I talked her into—it was one of those things where I could see how upset she was and she had mentioned Allah a number of times and I said, "Well, have you prayed about this?" And she said, "Oh yes, but I'm so tired." And I said, "Well, do you want me to pray for you?" And she said, "Oh yeah, please do!"

Potential subtheme: System-level reframing. One participant shared another type of reframing, a systems-level reframe, that could be further examined. In regards to her research, Participant 3 stated, "[My participants] helped me to not get drawn into [the belief that], 'Oh, religion is bad.' People have used it in bad ways. But that doesn't mean that it's bad. It doesn't mean that Bible is bad or that Christianity is bad."

Emotions towards God. All four participants shared that their emotions towards God were a form of coping as well, all mentioning feeling gratitude, comfort, and love as supporting them through their program. Participant 1 stated, "[I feel] gratitude, comfort . . . like a feeling of refreshment [towards my faith] . . . And then I think there's also the set of emotions of like, courage, perseverance, and fortitude." Participant 2 shared, "I was grateful for [my faith] because it grounded me and I think that I came out of the program feeling closer to God." Participant 4 found God to be a companion during hard times: "I spent an awful lot of time with God because I didn't have time to spend with anyone else . . . he was my friend—my constant companion."

Self-doubt: Merging identities. Another subtheme the researcher found in how the participants struggled to cope with their identity distress involved questioning their self-efficacy in both their burgeoning counselor identity and their white evangelical identity. For example, Participant 1 shared, "I think what I questioned . . . was me as a

person—can I get through this? Can I be a good counselor? Is this worth the effort? . . . I would much more quickly abandon counseling than I would abandon my faith." Speaking to this theme, Participant 2 stated, "I really had to dig deep and explore what my faith [is] doing for me and why is it so important to me? And what does the Bible say about this? Because I'm being told this, and then how do I balance these two things?"

Compartmentalization

Three of the four participants seemed to utilize compartmentalization as a coping strategy. Compartmentalization most commonly looked like being able to separate their counselor identity from their white evangelical identity while working with clients. Participant 1 shared the following:

> I think the two [issues] I was most apprehensive about before ever even getting into a counseling room were abortion and LGBTQ issues and not knowing how I would feel . . . to kind of put myself to the side . . . Ultimately, when that happened in the room—when I had a client who was pregnant or when I had a client come in and say they'd had an abortion, or when I had my first client who identified as "they," or talking about how to increase sexual pleasure with my client who is in a polyamorous relationship . . . it was the same as anything else, as any other topic in the room. I ended up having very little, almost no problem, with working with those clients. It was as if they had said anything else. Maybe outside of the room, I had to sort of do my own personal processing or understanding . . . but even then not very much . . .

Participant 2 noted the difference between being in the classroom and working with clients:

> I think in the classroom it was so much different than actually being with clients. At my internship, we're sitting with clients from all these different places. It was like, 'It's not about me.' So much of your classes are about you—your identity as a counselor and about who you are as a person and how your beliefs affect how you'll practice. And it was almost more of an issue in the classroom than it was in

> the counseling room for me . . . I got into the chair with my clients and I was able to put those things aside and just sit and be with you and fully in your world.

Participant 3 seemed to practice compartmentalization during the interview with the researcher:

> Now that's me personally. I want to be really clear. That's not me speaking as a counselor. I think that's not my role as a counselor . . . my own personal church life and spirituality.

Potential subtheme. One participant seemed to have difficulty accessing and discussing her emotional experience during her program. After exploring this, the participant shared, "I would say more during the middle of the process, I kept [my emotional process] pretty tight. I've probably talked about it a lot more since [finishing the research]." Future research might include exploring how (or if) white evangelical counselors in training process their emotional experience while facing identity distress.

Classroom Participation

The final subtheme in the coping with identity distress subtheme included classroom participation. When Participants 1 and 2 felt that they were being marginalized in their program, their participation in class changed rather dramatically. Participant 1 shared, "But even up 'til the end [of my program], there were some times where I didn't want to bring certain things up and didn't want my faith to be seen as a weakness of mine." Participant 2 stated, "I really scaled back the most [in Counseling Diverse Populations class] and by the end of the semester of that class . . . I just wasn't really sharing in class at all because it just became frustrating."

Ripple Effects into Faith Community

The sixth common theme in the During-Program phase included ripple effects from the program into participants' faith community. There was one common subtheme that occurred for three of the participants, and there were several potential subthemes that could be explored in future research. It is important to note that, with the potential subthemes, these trends seemed to being during their training program, but it was not exclusively located within the "during phase"; that is, it seems that these trends continued into and further developed in the After-Program phase. For the sake of convenience, the researcher is placing these subthemes in the During-Program phase.

Difficulty maintaining role. The most common subtheme here was the participants' ability to continue their previous role in their faith community during the program. For Participants 2 and 4, this was largely due to time constraints of their program. "The first year of grad school," Participant 2 reported, "I stopped leading the disciple group . . . and I stopped participating because I didn't have the time." For the participant in her doctoral program, she intentionally stepped back from her faith community as a way of protecting her spirituality.

> When I started my research, I just felt like it was going to be a really dark place to go and that I knew I was going to be looking at the really negative aspects of religion and I just felt like there was a great potential for that to take me personally to a dark place. I felt like I shouldn't be in a place of leadership roles in the church. We didn't leave the church, but we very intentionally stepped back from teaching . . . I needed to go back into more of a role of being fed rather than trying to feed people.

Potential subthemes. There were two potential subthemes that were only endorsed by one participant each. One might be anger towards organized religion and/or Christianity. This participant shared when interviewing participants in her search study on experiences of religious abuse and harm, "I [felt] just really really angry that something so pure and helpful to the world (e.g., Christianity) had been used in this way as a weapon." Another potential subtheme could be difficulty finding and relating to their previous faith community. Participant 3 shared,

> [After moving to a new city post-graduation], I was very intentional with the kind of church that I was going to be looking for . . . when I walked into a church full of old white men, I just would get sick to my stomach. I was just very . . . I wanted to be very intentional to do something else and not to go play church somewhere but to really be in a community that was doing good work and open to whoever wanted to come into that community.
>
> When I see Scripture on Facebook, I kind of have to take a breath . . . I see a lot of people from my small hometown who I think have not struggled with truly what their spiritual life means to them but just will throw out a Bible verse and that is supposed to solve everything . . . so I have to kind of talk myself through respecting everyone where they are and what's comforting for them rather than kind of have the negative reaction of rolling my eyes.

Experiences of Congruence between Identities

The final common theme that all participants discussed in their interviews were instances in which they felt that there was congruence between their counselor identities and white evangelical identities. There were three common subthemes in this section, which include the means by which they felt that these identities were congruent.

Acceptance by field. First, participants noted instances in which they felt that the field, generally speaking, supported their holding of both counselor and white evangelical identities. For example, Participant 1 shared,

> I did a research study about religion and a couple of other factors. And then I got to take that project to [Conference] and present it there. And again, I said, "Is anyone going to care about this because it's about religion?" . . . I don't know if people are going to want to hear about this, or if I'll get people who are strongly against it, and what am I going to say? Throughout the whole process I was so encouraged by my classmates, my professors . . . I was encouraged by [the conference] for picking it.

Similarly, the participant who completed her doctoral program shared,

> One of the fascinating things to me in that process was seeing how non-believers and non-Christians reacted to my research. I remember actually in my defense some people being like, "Wow, I had no idea this was so powerful." . . . this is the kind of research that people get fired up about whether they're Believers or non-Believers.

Finally, Participant 4 shared an experience in which she felt the field validated her faith:

> I had a wonderful professor . . . she talked about how faith was very important and that the counseling field . . . had finally . . . [seen that faith] is such an important strength that a person can have that will help them through many a situation and the counselor has a magnificent opportunity to rekindle faith or maybe get them back in touch with perhaps a wonderful support system through their church or Bible study or whatever it is.

Acceptance by program. Second, Participants 1 and 2 noted instances where they felt their specific program validated their identities as both counselors and white evangelicals. Participant 1 seemed to capture the essence of this subtheme in the following quote:

> Some of [my classmates] would write me notes . . . or we did activities where you had to write a compliment to someone or a word that comes to mind, and they would put things [for me] about faith. Or they would write, "I love the way you are so confident in your beliefs," or comments that I would never expect to come from someone who doesn't share that background.

Examples of successful compartmentalization/congruence. Finally, two participants gave examples of seeing successful compartmentalization or congruence in counselor and evangelical identities as validating. Participant 2 shared one of these instances:

> My internship site was a college counseling center and a supervisor there . . . identified as a Christian—I was like, 'Oh, hey, you can be this and also this.' This strong part of your identity doesn't necessarily have to affect other parts.

For the participant in the doctoral program, her participants in a research study helped validate her identities.

> There were at least two participants I believe who used the phrase, "I was able to separate God from what happened to me." And those that said that . . . I think to me that [meant] I should also be able to do that. And to hear that most of them had found communities—some had exited religion all together—but many of my participants have found other communities that they were [a part of] and that was helpful to me.

Potential subthemes. Participant 4 shared several statements that could become a potential subtheme of personal understanding of congruence between identities if further investigated. One of these were instances in which Christian and counseling values overlap. Participant 4 shared, "When you look at how Jesus helped other people, he was direct . . . he was understanding . . . he wasn't judging." Another potential subtheme

might be times in which religious identity is an asset to the counseling identity. Participant 4 shared, "As a Christian, I know that God has given me different abilities to be able to see situations . . . I can read a person and I can identify their pain . . . see[ing] them through God's eyes. God will allow me to see something that I couldn't have seen on my own." Finally, another subtheme in that could be explored in more detail is experiences of God in the program. Participant 4 stated,

> There's only been a few times in my life where I have really felt God's presence descend on me when I was doing something . . . and I wasn't praying at the time. That happened to me when I handed in a paper at the end of my first semester . . . I was like, 'I know I'm supposed to be here.'

Post-Program Common Themes

The final common themes are found in the Post-Program phase. These common themes included *effects on personal faith* and *effects on career.* These themes emerged as participants described how their experiences in their counselor training program continue to affect them today.

Effects on Personal Faith

In this subtheme, there were five different subthemes exploring how the program affected their personal faith after graduation. These subthemes vary from how the participants relates to God, their faith community, and themselves differently than they did before their program.

Importance of spiritual practices. Two participants noted the renewed priority of regularly observing their spiritual practices. Participant 2 shared,

> I think the things that I learned about myself within the program encouraged me to set different habits to be more intentional about my spiritual practices, rather than taking them for granted or leaning back . . . on the cognitive or head aspect of it . . . I'm reading the Bible daily . . . I'm volunteering . . . finding ways in the community I can help people.

Emotions towards faith. Three participants shared that their emotions towards their faith have increased in depth. For example, Participant 1 stated,

> I think by being a counselor and having unconditional positive regard for clients helped me to get a better idea of how God views me. No matter how many problems people come into my office with, no matter how much they cry, no matter if they're wearing their pajamas, or if whatever they say doesn't make sense, or if they tell me their worst secrets, I just want to love that person and I will be there for them and process it with them. And I will look forward to seeing them the next time, every single time. I get to love people in their brokenness and God does that for me times a million billion. What I do now goes to a depth that I hadn't really understood before . . . That's what God sees when he looks at me. And it makes me want to be more open and raw and vulnerable in my relationship with Him and know that there's nothing I can, nothing I can do that's going to make Him be like, "No! You're not allowed! You go away!"

Or, as Participant 4 succinctly stated, "I am so grateful . . . I'm in awe of how good [God] is. It's humbling and it's amazing . . . [that] I can spend time and just be with Him."

Confidence in white evangelical identity. Participants 1 and 2 shared that, despite their feelings of being marginalized in their program for their white evangelical identity, they gained confidence in this identity. For example, Participant 1 stated,

> I think today, [my experiences in my program] make me feel more confident in my faith. I've had practice having hard conversations. I've had practice not knowing what to say . . . I trust now that as those things happen in other ways in my life, I'm much more equipped to approach those in a positive way and a productive way. Whereas, before in the program, I wouldn't have known what to do and I probably wouldn't have handled it very well.

Beliefs strengthened. All four participants shared they felt that their faith had strengthened amid the challenges of their program. Participant 2 seemed to capture the essence of this subtheme with this quote: "I was grateful for [my program] because it grounded me and I think that I came out of the program actually feeling closer to God. Because I felt like I really had to make my . . . faith my own."

Shifted emphasis and/or priorities in faith. Finally, two participants described a shifting of priorities in their faith because of their program. Participant 1 shared,

> I live out my faith a lot more positively and by example. [Before the program], I never really called out everybody for living wrongly, but I would be more vocal about, 'Don't do this. This is wrong. You shouldn't do this.' And people who do that are important, but I think by having those deeper experiences with people, by understanding them more because of it, I shifted towards being more encouraging of what's right rather than condemning what's wrong. I don't know if that's a good thing or a bad thing, but I've lived out my faith more by promoting the beauty and promoting the good—and allowing my view of myself as a person of faith to follow in accord with that."

Participant 3 similarly stated, "I think [my experience] . . . has made me look for ways where I can advocate for the unconditional love and acceptance [of God]."

Effects on Career

The researcher found one final subtheme and one potential subtheme for further research related to the Post-Program's theme of effects to career. These themes include ways in which the participant would like to intentionally serve their in-group with their counseling identity and how the participant has integrated their white evangelical and counseling identity post-graduation.

Christian counseling opportunities. Two participants stated an interest in utilizing their counselor skills and training within their religious communities. Participant 1 noted, "I've had multiple priests tell me that they want to hire me to be a counselor for their church, which is ultimately what I hope to do." Meanwhile, Participant 2 shared,

> I'm considering in the future, I would like to become trained or proficient [in] Christian Counseling because I would like to actually be able to do not just counseling people identify as Christian, but actually do . . . biblical [counseling]. I'm eager to find a way to see how I can use my skills and my abilities to serve my church community.

Potential subthemes. A potential subtheme that Participant 1 mentioned might be focused on the process of integrating the counselor identity with the white evangelical identity post-graduation. She stated,

> I think I'm more able to mesh my faith identity and my counselor identity closer together now because they're not being so pulled apart all the time. In grad school, we reflect all the time about this and let's dig dig dig . . . It's like now, I'm free to just be whatever identity I need to be and of course, sometimes it shifts as we do as humans, but I don't feel as much contention anymore that I have to hide this and . . . I can just be me. However that needs to look. And that feels so much more peaceful. I'm not fighting against all these different pieces of myself. I can just be one person.

Summary

The purpose of Chapter IV was to present the results of the semi-structured interviews and data analysis in order to answer the research question. The researcher presented three phases of the participants' experiences and common themes and subthemes within those phases. In the following chapter, the researcher will discuss the results in light of current literature, particularly as it relates to Social Identity Theory

(Burke & Stets, 2009). Chapter V will also include a report on the limitations of this study, offer suggestions and implications for counselor educators, and opportunities for further research.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

In Chapter I, the author introduced the topic of religious identities in counselors and the difficulties white evangelical counselors might face in counselor education programs. Chapter II explored in more detail the nuances of social identities, particularly that of white evangelicalism, and the ways in which counselor education may not verify the white evangelical identity. In Chapter III, the author proposed a study, indicating the design, research questions, participants, procedures, and method of analysis and Chapter IV presented the findings of this study. In Chapter V, the researcher presents conclusions, discussion, and the implications of the results including a discussion of how the results fit into the previous literature and the Social Identity Theory (Burke & Stets, 2009) theoretical framework. Additionally, the researcher will examine the limitations of the study, offer potential implications for counselor educators, and present suggestions for future research.

Discussion of Results

The results will be discussed first in the context of the research question, then in respect to existing research and scholarly literature, which was reviewed in depth in Chapter II. Finally, the results will be examined in the context of the Social Identity Theory model (Burke & Stets, 2009).

Research Question

As recommended by Smith (2004), there was only one research question in this study: In what ways do counselor training programs affect white evangelical counselor's social identity as white evangelicals? To answer this question, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with four participants who self-identified as white Evangelical Christian women and believed that their counselor training program profoundly affected their Christian faith. The researcher and second coder used Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, 1996, 2003, 2004) to create a master list of themes describing the experiences of the participants. The transcripts and results were reviewed by an auditor.

Within the data emerged three phases of the participants' experiences, all of which held themes in the effects the counselor training program had on the participants evangelical faith. The three phases included the Pre-Program phase, the During-Program phase, and the Post-Program phase. The Pre-Program phase was a sort of "baseline" or "history" of the participants' white evangelical social identity; the common themes in this phase included: *Influential communities, Core beliefs, Identity standard, Decision to become a counselor, and Program selection.* The next phase was the During-Program phase, in which participants described their experiences of how the program affected their white evangelical social identity. Common themes in the During-Program phase included *Challenging program content, Perceived program rejection of the white evangelical identity, Role of faculty, Identity distress, Coping with identity distress, Ripple effects into faith community,* and *Experiences of congruence between counselor*

and white evangelical identities. Finally, the Post-Program phase described the lingering effects that the participants' training program had on their white evangelical social identity. These themes included *Effects on personal faith* and *Effects on career.* In many of these common themes, there were subthemes that described nuances to the effects and experiences. The researcher noted in Chapter IV that there were several potential subthemes that included only one participants' experience, but were areas for future research. Many of the themes found in this study were consistent with the existing literature, which will now be explored in more detail.

Comparison to Existing Literature

Though the existing empirical literature regarding white evangelical social identities is limited in the context of counselor education, it is still useful to compare the results of this study to the existing knowledge base. As such, the results are described within the context of the existing knowledge of white evangelicalism as a social identity and its relevance to counselor education.

Evangelicalism

In Chapter II, the author explored the history of evangelicalism as well as the commonly held definitions of what beliefs qualify an individual as an "evangelical." One helpful resource was the National Association of Evangelicals, a lobbyist group that endeavors to represent evangelical interests to the U.S. government while organizing its body to do the same in social and civic spheres (NAE, 2018a). The NAE crafted a four-part definition regarding the beliefs that are needed for an individual to be considered an evangelical. First, the individual must believe that lives need to be transformed through a

"born-again" experience and a life-long commitment to following Jesus; this is known as conversionism (NAE, 2018a). Second, there must be activism, or the expression and demonstration of the Gospel in missionary efforts, including social reform (NAE, 2018a). Next is biblicalism, or a high regard for and obedience to the Bible as the ultimate authority (NAE, 2018a). Finally, individuals must place an emphasis on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as is make possible the redemption of humanity, which is referred to as cruicentrism (NAE, 2018a).

The participants' responses when asked to define their religious in-group consistently followed the NAE's definition of evangelicalism. Two participants espoused conversionism sentiments with statements like, "I think to belong [to Christianity] means to have faith in the Savior Jesus Christ . . . and living out what Jesus teaches." Three participants named a community emphasis in evangelicalism, with Participant 2 naming activism efforts, "I believe in sharing the Gospel with other people." Three participants emphasized biblicalism, perhaps most succinctly described by Participant 4: "We celebrate the Bible as the Word of God." Finally, three participants utilized cruicentrism in their definition of an evangelical. Participant 3's words captured this concept almost identically to the NAE's definition: "We recognize that we've all separated ourselves from God due to our sin and that Christ paid the sacrifice for that – and because of that, we can be reconciled to God."

White Evangelicalism as a Social Identity

There were several trends in the data that seemed to support the notion of white evangelicalism as a social identity, as conceptually discussed in Chapter II. The "social"

part of the identity seemed to be incredibly important to all of the participants, particularly in the first two phases of their counselor training program. In the Pre-Program phase, the social aspect of the identity seemed most apparent as the participants described their personal history with religion and the sense of belonging the identity gave them.

Pre-Program Phase

In this section, two themes regarding white evangelicalism as a social identity will be explored in the context of the Pre-Program phase. Additionally, the researcher will provide an overview of how these themes fit into the context of Social Identity Theory (Burke & Stets, 2009).

Role of community in shaping identity. In the Pre-Program phase, the role of community was prominent when participants described their personal history with religion. In answering this question, all participants talked about the important individuals and groups who introduced them to this belief system and shaped their interpretation of this identity. All the participants began their narrative by discussing their family of origin and their orientation towards evangelical Christianity; their families were their first point of contact with their religious identity, though Participants 2 and 4 shared that their families were not always consistently involved in church. As the participants matured and developed, the communities that shaped their evangelical identities expanded beyond that of their families. Three participants discussed the importance of youth group and church bodies, and two shared their involvement in campus ministries as they moved into college. This trend of individuals and groups helping shape one's

identity fits with SIT view that a social identity is crafted through social comparison (Burke & Stets, 2000).

Sense of belonging. Additionally, a prominent theme that emerged in the data was the sense of belonging that the participants gained from their membership in the white evangelical identity. In speaking about her participation in a Bible study group, Participant 3 shared, "It was a really safe place for me . . . a place of comfort and guidance and reassurance." Similarly, Participant 2 also explored the social aspect of her white evangelical identity, saying, "I think being a part of a Christian community has been really important for me . . . my faith is definitely stronger at the times when I've got other believers . . . supporting me and encouraging me and just being role models."

When considered from a SIT framework, this theme of a sense of belonging commonly residing in participants' identity structure of white evangelicalism makes sense. Identities have both cognitive components as well as affective/emotional processes (Burke & Stets, 2009; Damasio, 1994), and emotions towards the self are a byproduct of the identity verification process. If an identity is verified, a positive evaluation of the self is made regarding the goodness of the self. Meanwhile, the opposite is also true: if an identity is invalidated, a negative evaluation is made regarding the badness of the self. Thus, when an individual's identities are verified, their feelings of self-worth, self-esteem, and self-authenticity tend to increase and individuals tend to become more committed in that identity—thus keeping the individual in the social identity and community (Burke & Stets, 2009; Cast & Burke, 2002). From a purely social identity theoretical framework (disregarding the role of the religion and spirituality itself), it

makes sense why this sense of belonging would be a prominent component in the data; individuals are going to stay in social environments that affirm their sense of self, feelings of worthiness, and self-efficacy.

During-Program Phase

In this section, two themes regarding white evangelicalism as a social identity will be explored in the context of the During-Program phase: support seeking trends and integration of sociopolitical issues from white evangelical identity into the counselor identity. Additionally, the researcher will provide an overview of how these themes fit into the context of Social Identity Theory (Burke & Stets, 2009).

Support seeking. The trend of seeking out like-minded community continued into the During-Program phase for many of the participants; they sought in-group support (i.e., evangelical Christian), particularly as they grappled with identity distress. This in-group support came in form of both in-program support and out-of-program support.

For three participants, finding in-program support from members of their group helped them cope with the identity related stress. These in-group, in-program supports provided, as Participant 2 stated, a "pillar" upon which they could rely for support and direction amid the challenging experiences that were occurring. Speaking to this, Participant 2 stated,

> I also found that there were people in the program who had really strong faith themselves and so being able to talk to them about these issues was really important to me because I was able to see how they were navigating these situations.

The same three participants also discussed the importance of relying upon out-of-program, in-group support systems. These seemed to be helpful as they reminded participants of the "outside" world, as Participant 1 mentioned. She went on to highlight the importance of having someone who was not a part of the "counseling" world who could relate to her. For Participant 2, having mentors who were also Christians and counselors helped her manage some of her identity distress:

> My counselor disclosed to me that she was a Christian and when she did that it was such a relief for me because I was like, 'Okay. You get my worldview. You're not going to think I'm a bigot or a bad person or something if I talk to you about my struggle with this or that. It was a real relief for me . . . that I felt like I can be vulnerable with you about these things even though I can't really talk about it in my program.

When considering this from the SIT framework, as mentioned above, seeking support from the in-group allows the individual to reaffirm their sense of self, feelings of worthiness, and self-efficacy within their social identity (Burke & Stets, 2009). Additionally, seeking verification of their identities as white evangelicals by other in-group members potentially disrupted some of the identity related stress. As McCall and Simmons (1978) found, people tend to escape the painful feelings that are associated with identity invalidation; by going to a source that will validate their identity and perspective, the participants may have found some relief from the identity distress.

Socio-political issues. The second trend in the common themes that seemed to support the notion of white evangelicalism as a social identity was the sociopolitical issues the participants held in their white evangelical identities, the integration of these issues into their counselor identities, *and* the reception of this integration process within

their programs. First, two participants identified a source of their identity distress was related to integrating their beliefs regarding abortion and LGBTQ+ identities into their new counselor identity. For example, Participant 1 described feeling "apprehensive" about working with presenting concerns surrounding "abortion and LGBTQ+ issues." Participant 2 expounding on this sense of apprehension when discussing an experience in her human sexuality course:

> What I was being told [by professors] is that I needed to be fully accepting [of polyamory], and not just like accepting and tolerant of, but like embracing . . . and so the idea of being an ally for a community that maybe sometimes the behaviors aren't necessarily healthy for maybe the kids involved . . . and so that's kind of where that tension of holding contradictory ideas in my mind at one time and having to figure out how do I manage this?

For these two participants, integrating these two beliefs systems was challenging by itself; this was seemingly made more difficulty by feeling, as they reported, like "outsiders" in their program. Echoing similar language as Zazumer (2019), Participants 1 and 2 seemed to feel mocked and/or vulnerable for beliefs. This was probably most apparent in Participant 2's interview. She stated that she was relieved when her personal counselor disclosed her identity as a Christian; Participant 2 recalled thinking. "You're not going to think I'm a bigot . . . if I talk to you about my struggle with this or that." The term "bigot" seemed substantial to the researcher. Consider this segment from the transcript of this interview:

> Researcher: The other thing that stuck out to me [in your story] was your use of the word "bigot." [It seems like] there's like an intense fear of, "I don't want people to see me as this awful thing." . . . so I have to almost protect myself sometimes from this perception.

> Participant 2: It's just those little comments [that non-Christians in the program would say] that made me feel like, "It's not . . . even though I don't feel that way or behave that way . . . I'm going to be lumped in with these people who are considered to be judgmental and intolerant and hateful bigots." And those few words are ones that cannot apply to somebody who wants to be a counselor.

There seemed to be a palpable sense of shame surrounding Participant 2 as she shared this story; she shared a pervasive feeling that she did not feel understood or accepted by her cohort members and some faculty members. This feeling seems to support the idea of white evangelicalism as a social identity in the sense that these socio-political stances make up the "activism" portion of the white evangelical identity (NAE, 2018a) *and* contribute to white evangelicals' social interactions with in-group and out-group members. Additionally, the critical reception of these socio-political stances, real or perceived, creates further polarization between in-group and out-group members.

Social Identity Theory

There were two aspects of SIT that seemed to be supported by the study: the identity salience hierarchy and the identity cycle. In this section, the author will explore the common themes throughout the data that seem to support these concepts.

Identity Salience Hierarchy

As mentioned in Chapter II, identity salience is the likelihood that an identity will become activated by the environment (Burke & Stets, 2000). As each person has a plethora of identities that they hold, it is possible for an environment to activate multiple identities at one time. The salience hierarchy helps the individual decide which role takes precedence in a given situation (Burke & Stets, 2000). Identities at the top of the

hierarchy tend to be the most "dominant" identities, such as gender or race, as they tend to then inform other roles and identities (Burke & Stets, 2000; 2009). For example, the identity of "woman" will inform the expression of the identity of "lawyer."

In this study, the data seemed to suggest that the social identity of white evangelical had a more dominant place in participants' salience hierarchy than that of counselor. Evangelical seemed to be a particularly salient identity for participants in their program and seemed to be foundational in their self-conceptualization. Consider the following quote from Participant 1:

> My beliefs have shaped a lot of how I view myself and how I view others – through that perspective that [humans] were created for goodness or created for community. And that framework changes how I live out all the different dynamics of my life: what I choose to pursue, how I choose to speak, how I choose to dress . . . everything kind of stems from that.

This sentiment was captured again when exploring Participant 1's experiences of identity distress; she stated, "I would much more quickly abandon counseling than I would abandon my faith." Participants 1, 2, and 3's examples of situations that induced some level of identity distress, and the frequency that these situations occurred in their program, suggested that the identity of white evangelical held a prominent place in their identity hierarchy.

The Identity Cycle

As mentioned in Chapter II, Burke and Stets (2009) consolidated much of the empirical and conceptual literature regarding SIT in their Identity Cycle. According to Burke and Stets (2009), an identity is composed of four basic components: an input, an

identity standard, a comparator, and an output. These components form a cycle that operates continuously once an identity is activated (Burke & Stets, 2009). The system begins when an input from the environment activates an identity, and is then compared to the identity standard (Burke & Stets, 2009). If the comparator determines that the input and identity standard match, then the identity is verified; if the comparator determines that the input and identity standard are not compatible, then an error message is produced and the identity is invalidated. An output, which is defined as an emotion and a behavior, is produced depending on the comparator's determination, and its job is to either affirm the identity if verified or to "course correct" if an identity is invalidated. This cycle seemed to be consistent with all four of the individuals' experiences, though three participants seemed to have their identities invalidated in their counselor training environment, while one participant felt as though her identity was verified by her training program.

Invalidated with limited in-group effects. For Participants 1 and 2, a series of events in their program environment, including internal dilemmas and external negative perceptions, activated their identity standard of white evangelical Christian. These internal dilemmas included reconciling belief systems and sociopolitical stances that did not seem congruent with the counselor identity, while external negative perceptions included the common themes of feeling marginalized and a subject of microaggressions within their program. For many of these internal and external inputs, the comparator seemed to deem the white evangelical identity as incompatible with the environment. Consider Participant 1's quote:

> [Now that I've graduated], I'm more able to mesh my faith identity and my counselor identity because they're not being so pulled apart all the time. In grad school, we reflect all the time about this and dig dig dig . . . It's like now, I'm free to just be whatever identity I need to be. And of course, sometimes it shifts as we do as humans, but I don't feel as much contention anymore that I have to hide this [identity] and . . . I can just be me. However that needs to look. And that feels so much more peaceful. I'm not fighting against all these different pieces of myself. I can just be one person.

From this incompatible error message from the comparator, an output was produced. The emotions of these participants seem palpable from the data: feelings of being misunderstood, defeated, and embarrassed. Participant 2's words, describing being "called out" in class for espousing different views than another classmate, spoke to these emotions directly:

> And it was . . . one of the hardest moments of graduate school just because I felt like so exposed. It was so catastrophic . . . [I was thinking], 'Oh my God. This is a nightmare . . . at least I'm wearing clothes because the only thing that could make this worse is like I'm naked in front of everyone.

When considering the identity cycle, it is clear that an incompatibility error occurred for Participants 1 and 2. Burke and Stets (2009) suggest that the behaviors associated with the cycle would function to "correct" for the incompatibility error. For Participants 1 and 2, these behaviors can be seen throughout the coping with identity distress theme: participating differently in class, seeking support from in-group members, and compartmentalizing the white evangelical identity.

For Participants 1 and 2, this process of having their identity invalidated continuously in the counselor training environment seemed to have more prominent in-program effects than out-of-program, in-group effects. That is, the participants began to

regard the in-program environment as unsafe, and they reported limited ripple effects into their faith community (e.g., they did not share feelings of doubt in faith, anger towards God or organized religion).

Invalidated with prominent in-group effects. Similar to Participants 1 and 2, Participant 3 experienced content within her counselor education program that activated her white evangelical identity. Instead of class content, though, it was her research topic – understanding experiences of religious abuse and harm. She stated,

> By doing my research and hearing horrific stories . . . I found myself really annoyed and sometimes to the point of being angry at what I see is really trite religion . . . people using their faith and their religion for their own power and their own personal gain.

The input, in these cases, was her participants' experiences of harm perpetrated by religion; when the comparator reviewed this input and compared it to her identity standard, an error message ensued. Her emotions and behavior, unlike participants 1 and 2, were directed towards the institution of white evangelicalism. As Participant 3 succinctly stated, "I've never been ashamed of Jesus Christ. I've often been ashamed of Christianity." Participant 3's identity distress could be described as a "values conflict," but it was not the same kind of values conflict as depicted by Participants 1 and 2. Instead, this values conflict revolved around an internal struggle between who Participant 3 had known and experienced God to be and how others have used religion for harm. Essentially, Participant 3 seemed to be asking herself, "How do I reconcile these experiences with this identity that has brought me such peace and belonging?" This struggle brought about a different kind of identity distress best encapsulated by

Participant 3's question about her thoughts regarding evangelism: "How much am I compromising by just . . . Knowing all the horrible things that religion has done, you know, [can I still be] encouraging people to be a part of it?

For Participant 3, the effects of her identity distress were limited in terms of how they affected her in program environment; however, she described rather significant effects to her in-group, out-of-program environment. She described difficulty relating to in-group members in the ways she did before her doctoral program and finding a new faith community, as well as feeling anger and impatience with organized religion.

Validated with no significant effects. In the case of Participant 4, the counselor education environment provided a consistent message: there was acceptance of and support for the white evangelical identity. Since the identity standard and inputs in the environment were consistent, no error messages were produced and the identity was validated. Thus, Participant 4 reported no identity distress due to her counselor training program. This experience is significant as it suggests two things: first, that a white evangelical identity *can* be verified in a counselor training environment, and second, white evangelical individuals do not inherently or inevitably experience identity distress in their program.

Emotions towards God

The researcher noted within the first three participants' discussions of identity distress a very limited discussion regarding emotions directed towards God. Participants 1 and 2 described a host of "negative" emotions towards the program, cohort, and faculty – such as frustration, misunderstood, and embarrassed – and Participant 3 described

feeling anger towards the institution of organized religion. Strikingly, none mentioned any feelings of anger, frustration, or confusion with God—all of which would be normal responses to identity-related distress. The researcher has formulated two theories about why this might be.

Spiritual Bypass

Spiritual bypass refers to the "unhealthy misuse of the spiritual life to avoid dealing with psychological difficulties" (Cashwell et al., 2010, p. 163). Essentially, spiritual bypass serves as a function of avoidance; it allows an individual to sidestep painful or difficult psychological work, such as facing unresolved emotional issues or psychological wounds, by focusing on spiritual topics or practices instead (Cashwell et al., 2010; Fox, Cashwell, & Picciotto, 2017). Spiritual bypass can take the form of disowning or repressing emotions towards God as a way of coping (Cashwell, Myers, & Shurts, 2004). Generally, an unconscious occurrence, spiritual bypass has been likened to a state of developmental arrest in which psychological symptoms such as anxiety and depression can increase (Cashwell et al., 2010). Unsurprisingly, spiritual bypass can jeopardize long-term spiritual wellness as it impedes the process of spiritual development (Cashwell, Bentley, & Yarborough, 2007).

The researcher theorizes that individuals experiencing religious-based identity distress might be using spiritual practices to either repress or replace negative feelings towards God, or they might ignore or compartmentalize the inward spiritual struggle and instead repress or replace negative feelings towards God. The researcher notes that this theory has flaws – particularly in its assumption that there "should be" anger or other

"negative" emotions towards God, which admittedly might not be a needed developmental and/or grieving task in the identity distress process.

Primacy of Social Aspect of Identity

The researcher's second theory posits that religious-related identity distress first triggers the social component of the identity, rather than the character of God or God as an entity. That is, perhaps the first avenue of "blame" for identity distress is towards physical, tangible people – particularly people the individual sees as "responsible" for the identity distress – rather than an incorporeal, spiritual being such as God. This seems to be substantiated conceptually by SIT; Burke and Stets (2009) stated that when individuals blame themselves for not being able to identify their identity standards, their negative feelings are directed towards themselves. When individuals blame others for identity distress, negative feelings are directed outward (Burke & Stets, 2009).

Regardless, without a comprehensive developmental model for successful resolution of religious identity distress, it is impossible to say for sure if negative emotions towards God are likely present. Though there are religious and spiritual developmental models that are highly regarded in the field, none seem to fit the nuances of identity distress experiences as discussed in this study. For example, Fowler (1981) described six stages of faith development, which explores holistic, organized development of spirituality across the lifespan, similar to Piaget's (1932) theory of cognitive development and Kohlberg's (1984) stages of moral development. Fowler (1981) proposed that not all individuals will progress through all six stages. One stage that seems most relevant for identity distress is the Synthetic-Conventional stage, which

acknowledges that it is normal for individuals to conform to religious authority's views of theology and that conflicts with one's beliefs are typically ignored for the fear and threats of inconsistencies. This could be an explanation for the conflict that arose in Participant 1 and 2's identity distress; that is, their identity distress stemmed from a desire to ignore conflicts within their beliefs and to continue to conform to their religious authority's views of theology. However, this explanation paints a rather simplistic view of the participants' faith and both of these participants stated that they did not question their beliefs during their program. Unfortunately, none of Fowler's (1981) stages sufficiently address Participant 3's identity distress, as Fowler's work focuses on the individual's movement through the stages with little acknowledgement of how systems and religious harm can affect faith development. Overall, while Fowler's (1981) model is foundational and helpful in exploring the exploration and potential maturation of faith/spirituality across the lifespan, it does not sufficiently address identity distress and its role in faith development. This lack of developmental models that include the experiences of identity distress are explored later in this chapter as an area for future research.

Limitations of Study

As with all research, there are limitations to this study. Though IPA methodology allows for as small a sample size as one participant (Smith, 2004), Smith recommended sample sizes between five and six participants and that was the original intended sample size for this study. However, the inclusion criteria were more limiting than the researcher expected. Despite an abundance of interest in the study and 40 completed Qualtrics

questionnaires, only six individuals qualified for the study and of those six, only four completed the interview process. In future studies of religious identity distress, the researcher will hopefully increase sample size by opening the study to individuals of all gender identities.

Another limitation of this study includes a wide range of time between graduation and the interview. Originally, the researcher hoped to have participants who graduated within 5 years of the study. Though three of the participants had completed their program less than 2 years from the time of the interview, one of the participants graduated roughly 7 years prior. Due to the already limiting nature of the inclusion criteria, this participant was included in the study for the sake of increasing the sample size despite being an outlier in terms of years between graduation and this study.

A limitation of this methodology is that the researcher relied solely on self-report data for this study. Utilizing other forms of data, such as journal entries, observational data such as class participation, or counselor educators' reflections on the student's progress might provide a more nuanced and holistic view of religious identity distress. This might also allow for more detailed understanding of the emotional and behavioral outputs that occur as a result of identity distress, both in the classroom and counselor training program, and in the participants' "outside" world.

It should also be noted that all of the participants stated that their faith was strengthened despite their experiences of identity distress; that is, none of participants reported their faith identity deconstructing at any level. This pattern was rather surprising to the researcher, as SIT posits that when identities are continuously invalidated, the

identity standard must change in some way to accommodate the environment and thus decrease the cognitive dissonance and psychological arousal (Burke & Stets, 2009). This trend could have been accomplished through the compartmentalization coping strategy some of the participants employed; however, the researcher was still surprised to encounter no deconstructed individuals.

The researcher theorizes that this study might have attracted individuals who wished to express their feelings of misrepresentation: either in their program or as a Christian, broadly. Another theory as to why this study did not contain an individual who was deconstructing their faith might be because those individuals were likely in a more vulnerable position and might not have been ready to share or reflect on their experiences.

A final limitation of this study could be the researcher's previous experience and bias with this particular research question. Though the researcher took measures to prevent her bias from influencing the findings of this study, including bracketing, utilizing a second coder and auditor with different religious and spiritual backgrounds, and member checking, it is possible that all of these measures could have missed instances of bias.

Implications for Counselor Educators

This study reiterates the importance of psychological safety in the classroom. Supportive learning environments are critical for student growth, development, and learning (Edmondson, 1999; Garvin et al., 2008; Giordano et al., 2018) and one component of a supportive learning environment is psychological safety. When a student

does not have implicit confidence that classmates and faculty will not punish or embarrass them for voicing an opinion, disclosing a mistake, or asking a question, their learning is significantly hampered (Edmondson, 1999). These participants' stories, particularly Participants 1, 2, and 3, highlight the reality of this construct. For Participants 1 and 2, psychological safety in the classroom was damaged and there were a host of negative outcomes, including identity distress and distancing oneself from the class and material. For Participant 3, psychological safety was present, and the participant reported no identity distress or problems in the learning environment.

This study also reiterates the presence of differing, intersectional identities present in counselor education settings and how the salience of identities and salience hierarchy can affect student behavior and learning. Although counselor educators are urged to consider students' intersecting identities in the classroom and supervision, it can be difficult to enact in practice (Jones, Welfare, Melchoir, & Cash, 2019). That is, in theory, counselor educators can acknowledge how intersectional identities could be affecting a student's learning, behavior in the classroom, or work with a client; but it could be difficult to practically utilize this information when trying to help a student navigate a values conflict *and* adequately practice gatekeeping for the field. If counselor educators could adopt the identity cycle into their conceptualization of the student's difficulty, it might provide non-judgmental language and perspectives, as well as encourage both the educator and the student to see this as a natural, understandable developmental task. If this was the case, how would conversations among counselor educators change regarding values related conflicts, remediation plans, or other gatekeeping practices be impacted?

Suggestions for Future Research

It is hoped that this study will provide future grounding for research related to religious identity distress. The researcher will now explore four potential areas for further exploration.

Spiritual Bypass and Identity Distress

One such avenue for future research could be further exploring the role of spiritual bypass in religious identity distress. Much of the research on spiritual bypass has focused on identification, conceptualization, and treatment of clients who may be utilizing spiritual bypass (Clarke, Giordano, Cashwell, & Lewis, 2013; Cashwell et al., 2007; Fox et al., 2017) or those avoiding spiritual bypass in addiction and 12-Step work (Cashwell, Clarke, & Graves, 2009). Though it has not yet been applied to religious identity distress, further exploration of how spiritual bypass may impact religious counselors-in-training could help counselor educators better understand the challenges and coping strategies of students who may be experiencing identity integration challenges around their religious beliefs.

Potential Subthemes from Findings

Within the study there were several potential subthemes that emerged in the data. These subthemes were explored tentatively in Chapter IV as only one participant endorsed each of these potential subthemes and thus did not qualify as relevant to the majority of participants. These subthemes were present in the During-Program Phase and After-Program Phase. For the During-Program phase there were seven potential subthemes, and in the After-Program Phase there was one potential subtheme.

The first potential subtheme in the During-Phase was under the common theme of *Coping with Identity Distress* when one participant cited instances of systems-level reframing. Rather than reframing the meaning of the experience in terms of self (e.g., "I learned something about myself") or other (e.g., "I learned how to relate to others"), the participant reframed what it meant to be a part of the system and her role in that system. Participant 3 shared, "[My participants] helped me to not get drawn into [the belief that], 'Oh, religion is bad.' People have used it in bad ways. But that doesn't mean that it's bad. It doesn't mean that Bible is bad or that Christianity is bad." In this quote, Participant 3 could be reorganizing her identity standard and the meanings associated with being a part of Christianity as an institution.

Another potential subtheme within the *Coping with Identity Distress* common theme in the During Phase, could be compartmentalization of emotions. In sharing about her emotional process while experiencing identity distress, Participant 3 shared that she kept her emotions "tight," meaning that she did not outwardly process the depth of her emotions with her support system often or thoroughly. It appears that this was a way of coping with the identity distress and could be an emotional and behavioral output in the identity cycle when the identity is invalidated.

The third and fourth potential subthemes in the During Phase relates to the common theme of *Ripple Effects into the Faith Community*. Participant 3 shared that she experienced significant barriers towards relating to her former in-group during and after her program. Participant 3 stated that she felt "righteous anger" towards her white evangelical in-group members, and had difficulty finding a church that fit her spiritual

needs post-graduation. **"**I [felt] just really really angry that something so pure and helpful to the world had been used in this way as a weapon." These two trends (anger towards the in-group and difficulty finding and relating to the in-group) could be outputs in the identity distress process that are directed towards the in-group environment.

The final three potential subtheme from the During-Program phase originated from Participant 4. Participant 4 was the sole participant who did not experience identity distress in her program. A reason for this might be because of the number of experiences she had in seeing congruence between her white evangelical identity and her counselor identity. One of these congruences, and a potential subtheme, was the connections she drew between her values as a Christian and those of the counseling profession. For example, Participant 4 stated, "When you look at how Jesus helped other people, he was direct . . . he was understanding . . . he wasn't judging." She also saw congruence in these two identities in her belief that her white evangelical identity benefited her role as a counselor. "As a Christian," she stated, "I know that God has given me different abilities to be able to see situations . . . I can read a person and I can identify their pain . . . see[ing] them through God's eyes. God will allow me to see something that I couldn't have seen on my own." Finally, Participant 4 shared specific spiritual experiences she had with God during pivotal points in her program. This might also be a form of congruence; "seeing" God show up tangibly in her program, affirming and blessing her work as a counselor. All of these experiences of congruence between the identities might have validated Participant 4's identity as a white evangelical in her counselor education environment, thus preventing identity distress from occurring.

In the After-Program phase, there was one potential subtheme that was espoused by one participant. Participant 1 described how, after graduating, she felt more free and able to integrate her identities of counselor and white evangelical. She stated, "Now, I'm free to just be whatever identity I need to be . . . I'm not fighting against all these different pieces of myself. I can just be one person." This potential subtheme hints at the continued management of the identity cycle and attempting to resolve identity distress after graduation. However, without multiple participants identifying these eight themes from the During- and After-Program phases, it is impossible to tell if these were common or individual experiences.

Deconstruction of Faith Identity

Deconstruction, as defined by the dictionary, is the "act of breaking something down into its separate parts in order to understand its meaning, especially when this is different from how it was previously understood" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020). This term has been used to describe individuals, particularly white evangelicals, who undergo religious identity distress and redefine their religious identity (Evans, 2014). To further the definition given above, many sociologists define deconstruction within Christianity as "a form of micropolitics in which actors establish competitive arenas in response to pressures for conformity" (Fuchs & Ward, 1994, p. 481). Put simply, those deconstructing are striving for a renegotiation of their religious identity. Individuals who experience deconstruction can arrive, as one might suspect, at many different religious locations: they might leave evangelicalism, Christianity, or religion all together, or they might "reconstruct" a different religious identity that allows room for their new

questions, ideas, or understanding of the spiritual (Marti & Ganiel, 2014). As mentioned earlier, none of the participants in this study identified as deconstructing; all of the participants shared that they identified as Christian currently and felt that their program had strengthened their beliefs. The researcher has posed two theories about why this study did not attract a participant who deconstructed during or after their program. Beyond this, though, the researcher would like to further explore the experiences of white evangelicals who deconstruct their white evangelical identity after experiencing identity distress. The researcher would like to understand the deconstruction process beyond the setting of counselor training programs; that is, how and why does deconstruction of white evangelical identities occur in general? This information would be helpful not only for counselor educators who might encounter deconstructing students, but also for counselors and other mental health professionals, as it might provide helpful information about best practices in caring for clients who are deconstructing.

Developmental Models: How to Incorporate Identity Distress?

Finally, the researcher hopes to continue exploring conceptual and empirical models for religious and spiritual development amid identity distress. The field does not currently have an empirically-based model that explores spiritual and faith development in the context of spiritual identity development, identity distress, commitment to the identity, and the potential for deconstruction of that identity. The researcher would like to explore the following questions: How do some individuals who experience religious identity distress resolve their distress with stronger beliefs and more confidence in their

identity? What are the factors that allow others to deconstruct and completely alter their religious identity?

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to address the gap in the research and answer the research question: In what ways do counselor training programs affect white evangelical counselors' social identity as white evangelicals? It is hoped that providing counselor educators with the common themes that emerged across four interviews will help counselor educators view their counselors-in-training with white evangelical identities with more depth and consider the nuanced challenges that these students could potentially face in their counselor training programs.

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APPENDIX A

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- How did you learn about this study?
    - What led you to participate in this study?
    - Do you have any questions before we proceed?
- Please tell me a little about your history with religion.
    - How did you become involved in organized religion?
- If you had to come up with the "criteria" for belonging to this group, what would that criteria be?
    - Certain beliefs or experiences? Religious practices?
- Prior to your counselor education program, what did it mean to you to belong to this group?
    - Tell me about your emotions towards your faith before your program.
- Did your faith impact your decision to become a counselor?
    - How did you choose your counselor education program?
- Tell me about how your counselor training program impacted your faith.
- Was there any content that you found particularly relevant or significant to your faith or religious beliefs?
    - Internship or classes?
- Were there any interactions with classmates, professors, supervisors, or clients that profoundly impacted your faith?
- How would you describe your emotions towards your faith during your counselor training program?
- Has your faith or religious beliefs have changed since beginning your training program?
- Were any of your religious beliefs reinforced in your training program?
- How would you describe your support systems during your program?
    - Who was supportive for you?
    - How were they supportive?
- Did you feel supported by your program as you were experiencing these challenges and/or affirmations to your faith?
    - If yes, what did this support look like?
    - If not, how would you have liked to be supported by your program during this time?
- How do those impacts from counselor program to your faith affect you today?
    - What effects, if any, show up in your relationship with God?
    - What effects, if any, show up in important relationships?
    - What effects, if any, show up in your faith community?
- What are your emotions towards your religious/spiritual life now?
- What would you say to counselors-in-training who are currently experiencing profound changes in their faith due to their counselor training program?

    - Is there anything you wish you could go back and tell yourself?
- What else would you like to share about your experience?

APPENDIX B

QUALTRICS PRE-SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

Faith and Counselor Training Programs

Hello! My name is Rebecca Cash and I am the principal researcher in this study examining the impact of counselor training on faith identity. Thank you for your interest in this study! Here's a bit more information about the study and what participation would entail:

Participants, if selected, would be interviewed via face-to-face, online, or phone call, and these interviews would last between 60-90 minutes. Participants must be over the age of 18, and be willing to have their interview audio recorded. All information shared during interviews will be treated as private and confidential. This includes any follow-up emails and phone conversations. I will be the only person who will have knowledge of the participants' identities, and I will be the only person who will have access to audio-recorded interviews. There is no cost to participate in this study, nor will compensation be offered.

Please take a moment to fill out this screening questionnaire. The researcher will get back to you within a week to let you know if you have been selected for an interview.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out to me at rmcash@uncg.edu.

Thank you again!

Questionnaire:

Please enter the following information.

- First and last name
- Email
- Phone number

Screening Statements:

1. *Please indicate if the following statement describes your experience:*

When I began my counseling training program, I believed that Jesus was the only way to salvation, the Bible held truth on right living, and I had a responsibility to share the Gospel with others.

- Agree: this statement describes my experience
- Disagree: this statement does not describe my experience

2. Please indicate if the following statement describes your experience:

My counselor training program profoundly affected, positively or negatively, my relationship with God, my faith community, and/or my identity as a Christian.
- Agree: this statement describes my experience
- Disagree: this statement does not describe my experience

Please indicate the following demographic information:
- Gender identity: (write in)
- Age: Select:
    - 20-39 years old
    - 40-59 years old
    - 60+
- Racial/Ethnic Identity: list of options which include:
    - Asian
    - Black/African
    - Hispanic/Latinx
    - Native American
    - Pacific Islander
    - White/Caucasian
    - Other: (write in)
- Sexual Orientation: (write in)
- Highest Level of Education
    - Master's (e.g., MS, MA, MC, EDS)
    - Doctorate (e.g., PhD, EdD)
- Was your counselor training program CACREP-accredited?
    - Yes
    - No
- Was your counselor training program a public institution?
    - Yes
    - No
- How long ago did you graduate from your training program?
    - (write-in)
- Did you pursue licensure in your state following graduation?
    - Yes
    - No
- Current religious and/or spiritual affiliation:
    - Note: you can select more than one option below. If none of these accurately describe you, please enter a more accurate description in the "other" box.
        - Agnostic
        - Atheist

- Buddhist
- Catholic
- Evangelical Christian
- Hindu
- Mainline Protestant Christian
- Muslim
- Spiritual
- Other

Thank you for your participation! If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the principal investigator at rmcash@uncg.edu.

Please expect an email from Rebecca within the next 7-10 days concerning participation in this study.

APPENDIX C

IRB CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO
CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT

Project Title: Counselors and Faith in Counselor Training Programs

Principal Investigator and Faculty Advisor: Rebecca M. Cash (PI) and Dr. Carrie Wachter Morris (Faculty Advisor)

Participant's Name:

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in the study is voluntary. You may choose not to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. There may not be any direct benefit to you for being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies. If you choose not to be in the study or leave the study before it is done, it will not affect your relationship with the researcher or the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Details about this study are discussed in this consent form. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study.

You will be given a copy of this consent form. If you have any questions about this study at any time, you should ask the researcher named in this consent form. Her contact information is below.

What is the study about?

This is a research project. Your participation is voluntary. The purpose of study is to understand the lived experiences of counselors who identify as Christian in their counselor training program. It is hoped that gaining a greater understanding of these experiences and identifying common themes of those experiences will help counselor educators provide a more helpful and supportive educational setting for counselors-in-training who identify as Christian.

Why are you asking me?

To be included in this study, participants must be 18 years of age or older, live in the United States, and must self-identify with the following statements:

"When I began my counseling training program, I believed that Jesus was the only way to salvation, the Bible held truth on right living, and that I had a responsibility to share the Gospel with others,"

and

"My counselor training program profoundly affected my relationship with God, my faith community, and/or my identity as a Christian, positively or negatively."

Participants must also agree to participate in an audio or video recorded initial interview regarding this experience, as well as one follow-up interview.

What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will meet with you either in person, over the phone, or over the internet to conduct an interview on the topic of your experience as a Christian in counselor education. I expect this interview will last about 1-1.5 hours, and you may choose to end or cancel the interview at any time. I will ask interview questions from a pre-made list I have created, however, you may add any additional comments you wish, even if it is not specifically asked. There may be other questions asked than what is on the interview sheet depending on where our discussion leads us.

After I analyze the data from all the interviews I am conducting, I will contact you for a follow-up interview, in which we will discuss the accuracy of the themes that emerged from your interview and all the interviews as a whole. I will do this to make sure I understand your experiences correctly, and to allow you to provide feedback to me regarding how I analyze the data. I will also ask you questions about what the interview process was like and if you have any new experiences or thoughts you would like to share with me regarding this topic. You may choose not to participate in this follow-up interview, but it is very important to me that your voice is the one that is heard in my analysis, so I do hope you will take the time to provide this feedback. This will be done via in person, telephone, or internet interview, and should take one hour or less of your time.

Religion and spirituality can be a difficult subject, and discussing your experiences may create some difficulty for you emotionally or psychologically. At the conclusion of our interview, if you indicate that you would like to see counseling services, I will work with you to identify potential service providers in your area.

If you have any questions about this study at any time, you may email me at

rmcash@uncg.edu or call 601-874-4755.

Is there any audio/video recording?

Our interview will be recorded by audio or video taping. This will ensure I remember our interview correctly. Because you may be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears/views the recording, your confidentiality for things you say on the tape cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will limit access to the tape as described below.

What are the risks to me?

The Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants.

As discussed above, religion and spirituality can be a difficult subject, and discussing your experiences may create some difficulty for you emotionally or psychologically. Prior to our interview, I will identify 3 licensed counselors in your area if you desire this as a way to address any emotional or psychological difficulty. If you utilize this service, you will be financially responsible for these counseling services, but every effort will be made to connect you will someone on your healthcare plan if you have one, or someone who offers sliding fee services if you do not.

If you find yourself in crisis at any point, you may also call 1 (800) 273-8255, 24 hours a day.

If you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact me, Rebecca M. Cash at rmcash@uncg.edu or 601-874-4755, or my faculty advisor, Dr. Carrie Wachter Morris, at cawmorris@uncg.edu.

If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study, please contact the Office of Research Integrity at UNCG toll-free at (855)-251-2351.

Are there any benefits to society as a result of me taking part in this research?

As a result of your participation in this survey, the counseling education community may have a better understanding of what happens to counselors-in-training who experience profound changes in their faith due to their counselor training program. So, it is possible that your participation will be helpful to both counselor educators and their future students.

Are there any benefits to *me* for taking part in this research study?

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study, although people often find it therapeutic to discuss difficult emotional experiences, so it is possible that this may be a therapeutic experience for you.

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?

There are no costs to you or payments made for participating in this study other than your cost involved in travelling to our meeting location, which will be determined by you and may not involve travel, or the costs involved with using the telephone or internet on your end.

How will you keep my information confidential?

I will make every effort to keep your information confidential. However, as stated above, I will be recording our interviews and because you may be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears/views the recording, your confidentiality for things you say on the tape cannot be guaranteed. Your name will not be attached to the recording directly. If I use a quote from you for the data analysis or when publishing the results, your real name will not be used.

There may be some information that I would not be able to keep in confidence, including any known danger to you or others, any child or elder abuse, or if I were required to disclose information by a court order.

As you know, the internet also has limitations with confidentiality, so if we are conducting our interview online, I cannot guarantee our interview will be completely confidential due to the possibility of hacking, or of other people accidently overhearing our interview on my end or your end. On my end, I will be alone when conducting the interview so that no one will hear our conversation.

All hard copies of information and recordings will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my home. The recordings will be destroyed at the end of the study. Any electronic versions of the information, such as the written transcripts, will be kept on Box, a HIPPA-compliant software storage drive that is used by UNCG and is password protected.

All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

What if I want to leave the study?

You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may

request that any of your data that has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state. The investigators also have the right to stop your participation at any time. This could be because you have had an unexpected reaction, or have failed to follow instructions, or because the entire study has been stopped.

What about new information/changes in the study?

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

Voluntary Consent by Participant: By participating in the study activities, you are agreeing that you read this consent form, or it has been read to you, and you fully understand the contents of this document and are openly willing consent to take part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. By participating in the study activities, you are agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate in this study described to you by Rebecca M. Cash.

_____ _____

Participant Signature Date

APPENDIX D

EMAIL AND LISTSERV RECRUITMENT

For IRB 20-0183

Hello!

My name is Rebecca Cash and I am the principal researcher in a study examining the impact of counselor training on faith identity. I am hoping to recruit counselors for this study who identified as Christian at the time of their counselor training program (though they do not currently have to identify as Christian to participate in the study).

Participants, if selected, would be interviewed via face-to-face, online, or phone call, and these initial interviews would last between 60-90 minutes. Participants must be over the age of 18, and be willing to have their interview audio recorded. After the initial interview, the researcher will conduct a follow-up interview to share the themes and results that have emerged from the interviews so that the participant can give feedback on the accuracy of the themes to their experience. All information shared during interviews will be treated as private and confidential. I will be the only person who will have knowledge of the participants' identities, and I will be the only person who will have access to audio-recording of the interviews. There is no cost to participate in this study, nor will compensation be offered.

Please take a moment to fill out this screening questionnaire. The researcher will get back to you within a week to let you know if you have been selected for an interview.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out to me (the principal researcher) at rmcash@uncg.edu or 601-874-4755.

Thank you again!

Rebecca M. Cash

APPENDIX E

FOLLOW-UP SCRIPT/TEXT TO INITIAL CONTACT: ACCEPTANCE

For IRB #20-0183

Thank you for your interest in my study on the experiences of faith in counselor training programs! I appreciate the time you took to complete the pre-screening survey. You have been selected to participate in this research study. If you are still interested in participating, please read the attached consent form and let me know if you have any questions. If, after reading the consent form, you decide to participate in the study, please let me know and we will then schedule a time to complete our interview. Before we begin the interview, I will go over the consent form and give you time to ask any questions you might have. After this, I'll have you sign a copy of the consent form and we will begin our interview. Thank you again for your interest!

Sincerely,
Rebecca M. Cash

APPENDIX F

FOLLOW-UP SCRIPT/TEXT TO INITIAL CONTACT: NO THANK YOU

For IRB #20-0183

Thank you for your interest in my study on the experiences of faith in counselor training programs! I appreciate the time you took to complete the pre-screening survey. While your experiences are important, at this time, you do not meet the criteria for my limited study. I will retain your contact information and reach out to you in case you meet the criteria for a future study. If you would like the opportunity to discuss your experiences with a mental health professional, please let me know and I will be happy to provide a referral to someone in your area. Thank you again for your time and interest!

Sincerely,
Rebecca M. Cash

APPENDIX G

SOCIAL MEDIA RECRUITMENT MATERIALS